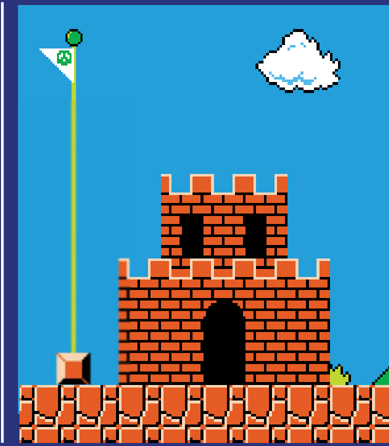
OLD!

THE ESSENTIAL GUIDE TO CLASSIC GAMES

# retro GAMER™



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ISSUE 147

AMSTRAD | COMMODORE | SEGA | NINTENDO | ATARI | SINCLAIR | NEO GEO | SONY | COIN-OP | MOBILE



## 30 GREATEST SUPER MARIO MOMENTS

DEVELOPERS REVEAL THEIR ALL-TIME FAVOURITE MARIO MEMORIES

## ZX SPECTRUM VEGA TESTED

## TOMB RAIDER

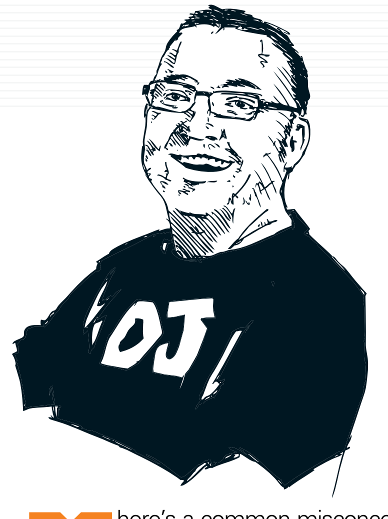
DISCOVER THE ORIGINS OF LARA CROFT: GAMING'S GREATEST LEADING LADY

**PLUS** FRIDAY THE 13TH ■ INTERTON ELECTRONIC VC 4000 ■ VORTEX
11 GAME BOY GEMS ■ AMIGA 1200 ■ KIRBY 64: THE CRYSTAL SHARDS
HUMAN ENGINEERED SOFTWARE ■ MORTAL KOMBAT II ■ KICK OFF 2



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# THE RETROBATES

WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE MARIO GAME?



## DARRAN JONES

One of my favourite Mario memories is booting up *Super Mario 64* for the first time and realising you can manipulate Mario's face.

**Expertise:**
Juggling a gorgeous wife, two beautiful girls and an award-winning magazine.

**Currently playing:**
*Magic: Origins*

**Favourite game of all time:**
*Strider*



## NICK THORPE

I love playing Sweet Sweet Galaxy in *Super Mario Galaxy.* Even when Nintendo is being creative, there's always solid platforming at the core.

**Expertise:**
Owning six Master Systems (I sold one)

**Currently playing:**
*Firebugs*

**Favourite game of all time:**
*Sonic The Hedgehog*



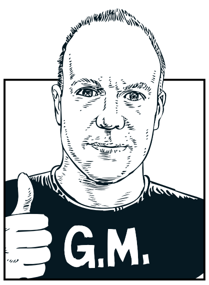
## PAUL DRURY

The very first time I jumped off that lift and found Mario could run above the screen. It felt like a glitch, like you'd find in an 8-bit computer game, and then you discovered warp zone and thought, Oh they're in on the joke…

**Expertise:**
Del Boy fashions

**Currently playing:**
*Until Dawn*

**Favourite game of all time:**
*Sheep In Space*



## GRAEME MASON

Playing the shoot-'em-up levels of *Super Mario Land* on the original Game Boy.

**Expertise:**
Adjusting the tape azimuth with a screwdriver

**Currently playing:**
*Streets of Rage 2*

**Favourite game of all time:**
*Resident Evil 4*



## DAVID CROOKES

By collecting 120 stars in *Super Mario 64,* Mario could meet Yoshi on top of Princess Peach's castle. A nice touch.

**Expertise:**
Amstrad, Lynx, adventures, Dizzy, and PlayStation (but is it retro? Debate!)

**Currently playing:**
*Broken Sword 5: The Serpent's Curse*

**Favourite game of all time:**
*Broken Sword*



## ANDREW FISHER

Reaching the secret Star Road in *Super Mario World* gave a real sense of achievement.

**Expertise:**
Commodore 64 and Nintendo fan, gaming for 32 years

**Currently playing:**
*Animal Crossing: Wild World*

**Favourite game of all time:**
*The Great Giana Sisters*



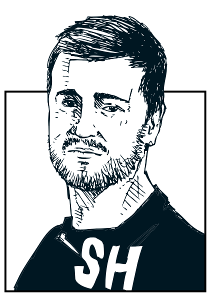
## MARTYN CARROLL

When you complete World 8 in *Super Mario 3D World* and you think it's all over… and then the rocket appears, blasting you towards the bonus worlds.

**Expertise:**
Sinclair stuff

**Currently playing:**
*Trials Fusion*

**Favourite game of all time:**
*Jet Set Willy*



## STEVE HOLMES

When I discovered that you had to throw a spiky turtle at large bombs in a lava pit. What a bizarre boss fight. Nearly broke my joystick, as well.

**Expertise:**
Foraging for coins

**Currently playing:**
*Metal Gear Solid 5: The Phantom Pain*

**Favourite game of all time:**
*Dark Souls*



## JON WELLS

Discovering the secret exits when you fly up above the top of the stage in the ghost house opening up different levels on the map.

**Expertise:**
Tackling dirty nappies and retro spreads

**Currently playing:**
*Destiny: The Taken King*

**Favourite game of all time:**
*Super Mario World*

# LOADING...

There's a common misconception that Mario features heavily within the pages of **Retro Gamer**. Sure I've sometimes dressed up as the popular plumber and he'll occasionally pop up in the odd feature (you can't have a platform feature without mentioning him for example) but if you look at the actual dedicated Mario features we've run over the last ten years, you'll find them few and far between then.

So welcome then, to the mother of all Mario features, a feature so big and bold that we were concerned that our designer Jon would forever be plagued with nightmares of the happy-go-lucky plumber. We've thought long and hard, and with the help of readers, gathered some of the most memorable moments from the 30-year-old series. We've also contacted numerous developers so they can share their own moments about Nintendo's most famous creation over our huge 22-page feature. But worry not, if you're not a fan of Mario, you'll still find plenty to enjoy in this issue, like features on *Mortal Kombat II*, *Splatterhouse*, *Tomb Raider*, Human Engineered Software and much more. We've even managed to get a hands-on with the new Spectrum Vega. There really is something for everyone.

Enjoy the issue!



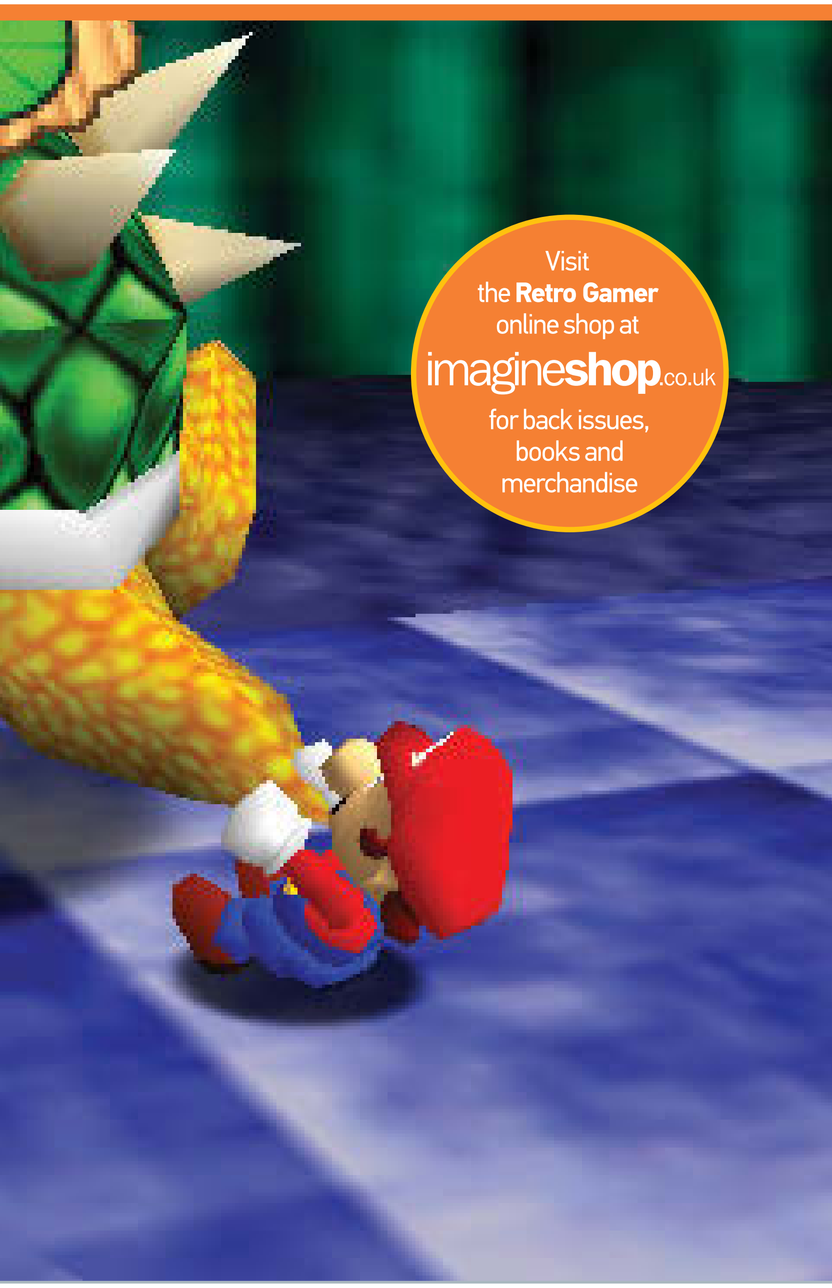
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**>> Load 147** Breathing new life into classic games

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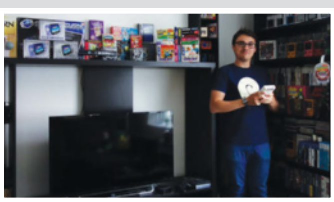
# THE RETURN OF TUROK

## Night Dive Studios is resurrecting the first two Turok games for PC

» [N64] *Turok 2* should hopefully include the enhanced N64 graphics.

## CONTENTS





***Turok: Dinosaur Hunter* and *Turok 2: Seeds Of Evil* are being remastered for PC by Night Dive Studios, the team responsible for the remasters of *System Shock 2* and the *Tex Murphy* games.** Aiming for a late-2015 release for the first *Turok* game and early-2016 for its sequel, Night Dive plans to distribute the game through popular digital platforms like Steam, GOG and more. We spoke to Stephen Kick, founder of Night Dive, about plans for the new versions of these dino shooters.

"For many people, *Turok* was their first foray into the first-person shooter genre," begins Stephen, when asked what drew the company to the *Turok* series. "It combined action, and puzzle-solving within a vast, non-linear world populated with memorable enemies, battles and inventive weapons. For me it was my first experience with a 3D accelerated PC game and back in 1997 it blew my mind. I knew that re-releasing the original *Turok* games would resonate strongly with our community, but I couldn't have anticipated the response we've received so far – it's been overwhelmingly positive."

The big problem with early 3D games, as you will most likely have experienced yourself when returning to them, is the fact that the polygonal graphics of the era really don't hold up well anymore. Stephen agrees, but also thinks that *Turok* and its sequel demonstrated many other qualities that will translate well to today's market. "*Turok* was one of the first 3D FPS titles that really captured the attention of the gaming populace in the mid-Nineties and I feel a lot of that is owed to the visual fidelity, solid controls and polished mechanics," he says. "What the original developers achieved on the N64 was remarkable. The visuals may not hold up to today's standards, but they managed to find a unique aesthetic that is instantly recognisable. There aren't many other FPS games from the same time period that can make the same claims."

Stephen goes on to explain that Night Dive hopes to go further than just enhancing texture maps and 3D models, and plans to take on *Turok*'s trademark fog, telling us, "We are implementing a number of new rendering features that will maintain the overall aesthetics of the games and push the level of immersion while enhancing the overall atmosphere and level of detail. We're also experimenting with the notorious fog that permeates *Turok*'s DNA. At



» [N64] The original *Turok* was a big success on Nintendo's console.



## STRAIGHT SHOOTERS >> Three other FPS games we'd love to see remastered



### SOLDIER OF FORTUNE

■ It wasn't a exceptional game, upon reflection, but for many people *Soldier Of Fortune* was something of a guilty pleasure. Released for PC in 2000, and subsequently Dreamcast and PlayStation 2, the game turned heads for its gore, which we'd secretly love to see in full 1080p glory on modern consoles.



### METROID PRIME

■ *Metroid Prime* hit the GameCube in 2002 and was the first *Metroid* game to play out from a first-person perspective, focusing mostly on exploration and plot as opposed to out and out warfare. It would be great to see this superb Samus outing remastered for the Wii U or the forthcoming Nintendo console.



### DAY OF DEFEAT

■ For those of you that haven't played it, *Day Of Defeat* is a WWII deathmatch FPS built on the shell of *Half-Life*. For those of you that have played it, you'll know that an updated version for the Source engine was released in 2005, but how good would it be to get it bumped up to 1080/60? Very, is the answer.

the time the fog was a necessary evil in order to limit the draw distance of the levels – the open world was so big [Iguana] had to come up with a way to hide missing geometry and to increase the frame-rate to a playable level."

That's the looks taken care of, sure, but more problems present themselves when the actual code comes into question. After all, often companies like Night Dive don't have access to original source code, as Stephen intimates. "With *Turok*, we are still evaluating our best course of action," he reveals, "however with many conversions, like with *The Original Strife: Veteran Edition*, we didn't have access to the original source code so to really understand how it worked our lead engineer spent months disassembling the game, separating out the various data formats that controlled the sprites, the animations, the levels, the AI; basically every function of the game. Once he figured those out he could use them as a guide to rebuild the game inside a custom-made engine."

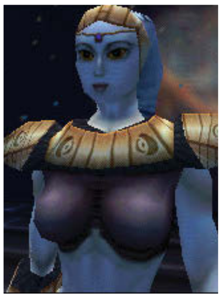
Night Dive has developed a strong reputation over the years for quality conversions, with *System Shock 2* being a particular highlight. The team has also remastered older franchises, including three of the *Wizardry* games, the *Trilobyte* games *The 7th Guest* and *The 11th Hour*, and *PowerSlave*. Nightmarish negotiations over decades old IP aside, we asked how Night Dive goes about selecting its projects from such a vast back catalogue of superb games. Stephen suggests that it's down to several key factors.

"We get dozens of requests from fans on a daily basis and as a company we really try to respond to that, although the games aren't always available," he tells us. "We also have an internal list of titles that resonate strongly with the community and the team. We also look at reviews for titles; was this game received well when it was first released? The other thing that you should know is that we are all fans. Everyone on our team played and enjoyed the classic games. We are lucky enough to get to work on the games that we love."

Remastered versions of games are very much in vogue nowadays, both in the retro space and the triple-A space. Stephen thinks that there are a number of reasons for this: "First off, many of the people that played the games originally are still gamers and appreciate the opportunity to revisit their first experiences with the medium," he says. "For the younger generation the games are new and an exciting way to explore the history of gaming. Second, a lot of those games were really revolutionary in presenting new game mechanics that had never been seen before. Sometimes a mechanic isn't recognised as being a breakthrough at the time, but in retrospect you're able to see how influential it was in shaping the current landscape of gaming. Finally, remasters are generally offered at lower prices but can offer just as much, if not more of an amazing experience than a new game."



» [N64] *Turok*'s combination of shooting and exploration made it stand out on Nintendo's console.



» [N64] If a new *Turok* didn't work out there were always casting calls for *Avatar 2*…



» [N64 The only good dinosaur is a dead dinosaur.






## ARTCADE RESURRECTED

We're still amazed at the difficult gestation Tim Nichols' book project has gone through. When *Artcade* was first announced it smashed its fundraising goal of £10,000 because it looked like it was going to be an essential book for anyone that grew up in the arcades of old.

Despite an estimated release of December 2013, the project was hit with problems that ranged from tragic personal issues for its author, to a change in publisher. In July it looked like the project was doomed.

Luckily, Tim's found a solution and Sam Dyer of Bitmap Books has revealed that he's now involved in the project. It won't be released until April 2016, but Sam's work on two Kickstarter books suggests that this exciting looking project will finally be happening.



## PLAYSTATION BOOKAZINE!

If you grew up enjoying Sony's classic console you're going to adore our new **PlayStation Book**. We have combed the archives to deliver all the best content from the last ten years of the magazine. As a result virtually every major game is covered from *Metal Gear Solid* and *Final Fantasy VII*, to *WipEout*, *Resident Evil* and *Castlevania: Symphony Of The Night*. You can buy it now from all good retailers or directly from **imagineshop.co.uk.**




» [3DO] Sadly, *The Need For Speed* isn't one of the games that will be heading to Zoom.



# 3DO RETURNS

## ZOOM DIGITAL PLATFORM ACQUIRES 3DO TITLES

Fans of the 3DO may be interested to learn that a number of its games will start appearing online. Jordan Freeman, the CCO and founder of Zoom, a digital games platform, has recently secured a large number of 3DO games to sell on the service.

Before you get too excited, it's important to point out that the deal doesn't include any Electronic Arts games, meaning classics like *The Need For Speed*, *FIFA* and *Road Rash* won't be available. The current list is also small, although that doesn't mean more games can't be secured at a later date by ZOOM.

The games available include, *Battle Sport*, *Snow Job*, *Gridders*, *Blade Force*, *Captain Quazar* and *Killing Time*. The horror FPS is the only game that currently available to buy at the moment, although it's actually an enhanced version of the PC original, and can be purchased for a not unreasonable price and modest price of $5.99.

The 3DO was an impressive console that really was ahead of its time, so it's exciting to see that companies are starting to make an effort to bring its games to a wider audience. Head on over to zoom-platform.com for more information.

# GRIP LOSES TRACTION

## DEVELOPERS ABANDON KICKSTARTER PROJECT

Shortly after our last issue went to press it was revealed the Grip Kickstarter was to be terminated. The spiritual successor to *Rollcage* wasn't looking like it would hit its targets for Kickstarter, so the developers took matters into their own hands and cancelled the fundraiser. The game still lives on, however, as it's now being made available on Steam Early Access. This does mean that those looking forward to a console port may have to wait a little longer, but it at least ensures that work on the game can continue. A number of tier-styled payment options are available directly from *Grip*'s website, ranging from $26.50 to $53 CAD. You can get more information and make a pledge by visiting cagedelement.com/grip.



» [PC] Its Kickstarter may well have stalled, but *Grip* still has plenty of life in it.



# Living la vinyl loca

## Data Discs' Jamie Crook talks to us about bringing videogame soundtracks to vinyl

**Why did you decide to start up Data Discs?**
I'm a lifelong vinyl buyer with an interest in championing under-appreciated and/or obscure music. For one reason or another, game soundtracks often fit perfectly into that category and it's an area that really hasn't been explored much on the vinyl format before, at least not outside of Japan. Videogames have been hugely influential on popular culture over the past 30 years, yet their soundtracks (and in particular the composers behind those soundtracks) seldom get the attention they deserve. We hope our label with go some way to remedying that.

**Is there any reason why your first two releases are Sega games?**
Sega was the first publisher we started working with, hence why our first releases are some of its titles.

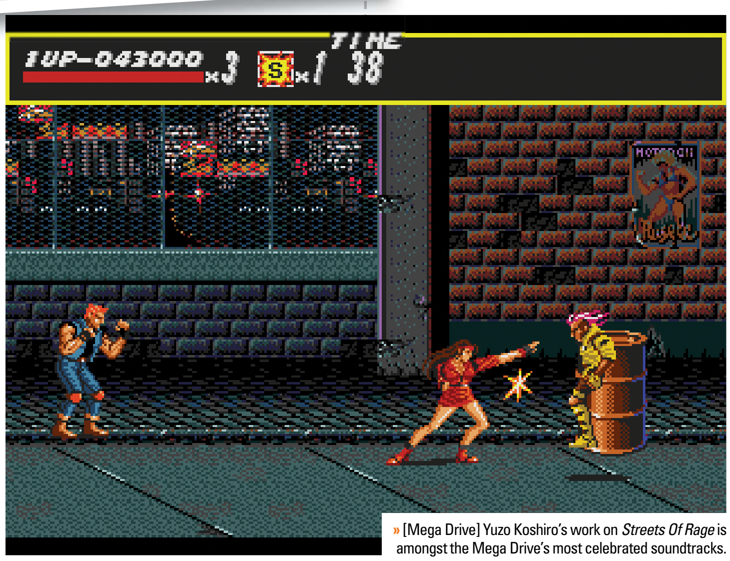



**How do you go about selecting soundtracks to convert?**
Firstly, we have to like the music, otherwise we would find it practically impossible to sustain our enthusiasm throughout the process, which in itself is a time-consuming process. Secondly, the soundtrack must benefit in some way from being on vinyl. We're not in the market for producing novelty records for the sake of it; they're designed to be played.

**How long does the vinyl pressing process take?**
Manufacturing can take anywhere between six weeks and six months, depending on the complexity of the project and how backed up the pressing plants are. There's also licensing, audio sourcing, mastering, graphic design and other considerations that need to be taken into account before manufacturing can begin. It can be a lengthy process, but ultimately a rewarding one.

**Why have you been concentrating on coloured vinyl options?**
People buy records for different reasons, so we offer a choice between coloured vinyl and black vinyl. Coloured vinyl isn't a focal point for the label; it's an optional decoration for those who want it.

**Will the albums be single or double LPs?**
That's decided on a case-by-case basis. It depends on the requirements of each soundtrack.




» [Mega Drive] Yuzo Koshiro's work on *Streets Of Rage* is amongst the Mega Drive's most celebrated soundtracks.



» [Dreamcast] *Shenmue*'s soundtrack was directed by Takenobu Mitsuyoshi, best known previously for his upbeat arcade compositions.






» Coloured options are available for both of the initial Data Discs releases.

> **"We're not in the market for producing novelty records for the sake of it"**
> Jamie Crook

**Why do you think so many soundtracks are beginning to appear on vinyl now?**
The film soundtrack market has been flourishing in recent years and videogame soundtracks are just a natural progression from that. So long as the market doesn't become saturated too quickly by opportunistic labels, or those without an inherent enthusiasm for the format, then game soundtracks have a bright future on vinyl.

**What's your favourite videogame soundtrack and why?**
The *Streets Of Rage* trilogy is certainly up there. Although I'm afraid I can't comment any further without giving away some of our forthcoming titles! There are a lot of amazing soundtracks out there that deserve people's attention, regardless of whether or not I personally like them. Hopefully our releases will encourage people to explore this fascinating area of music for themselves. *



» Data Discs releases come with added extras for collectors, including art prints.



### KIRBY'S DREAM LAND (GAME BOY)

"This is the first Game Boy game I ever owned. I got it for my fourth Birthday and still have my original Game Boy from back then."

**PAID: €0**

### TRIP WORLD CART (GAME BOY)

"When I first started trying to obtain a complete Game Boy collection, I knew this one would be a major hurdle and unlikely to be found in the wild, so I just bought it straight away. It's one of my favourite games of all time."

**PAID: €80**

### KID DRACULA (GAME BOY)

"I played this to death as a kid after finding the cart in a boot sale. I wanted it boxed but it's rare. Fortunately I picked it up in a games shop in Germany while on holiday."

**PAID: €20**

### MR. GIMMICK (NES)

"This game pushes the NES to its limits. As an SCN exclusive it's a rare and sought after title. I got it in a joblot when a friend switched from physical carts to an Everdrive."

**PAID: €300**

### BAMSE (GAME BOY)

"I bought this from a Danish flea market. It's based on a Swedish comic strip although the UK version would have been a game with Edd The Duck in it and it only exists as a prototype. If anyone out there has it, please get in touch!"

**PAID: 30kr (about £3.00)**

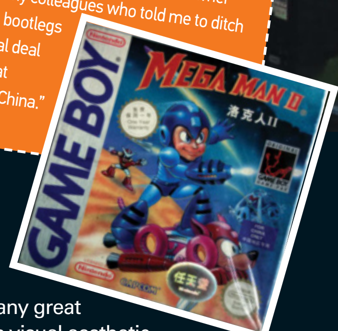
## JEWEL IN THE CROWN

### THAT PIECE YOU CAN'T BE WITHOUT

### COMPLETE OFFICIAL CHINESE RELEASE OF MEGAMAN 2 (GAME BOY)

■ "For a period, a company called Mani created Game Boy carts for the Chinese market. While visiting China I was lucky enough to stumble across this in a store loaded with bootlegs. I paid ¥10 for it as the owner thought it was another bootleg, as did my colleagues who told me to ditch the box and hide the cart as importing bootlegs is illegal. I was convinced it was the real deal and fortunately no issues were raised at customs. It's almost unseen outside of China."

**PAID: ¥10**



# Collector's corner

## Readers take us through the retro keyhole



### BIO

**NAME:** Mat Boyle

**ESTIMATED VALUE:** £25,000

**FAVOURITE CONSOLE:** Nintendo Game Boy

**FAVOURITE GAME:** *Bubble Bobble*

Game Boy devotee Mat, who works in Denmark as a graphic designer for the Lego Group begins with how he got hooked to gaming: "I grew up in a Nintendo household. I inherited my elder brother's NES, and not long after I got a Game Boy for Christmas along with *Kirby's Dreamland* and *Super Mario Land 2*." Other than nostalgia, it's the famous Nintendo handheld's simplicity that attracts Mat to it. "It's designed for fun, compact gaming experiences," he explains. "Some games are flawed, yes, but there's no 15 minute tutorial – you just play and have fun. It's game design boiled down to its essentials and I love it."

Many of Mat's prized acquisitions have come from holiday or business trips. "I do travel a lot and try to visit a store in whatever part of the world I'm in," he says. "For the most part my collection is cart-only, although I've got about a fifth of my games complete in box. Boxed games for me are a whole other level, as a £3 common title can go for ten times that much boxed." Even so, tracking down cartridges can sometimes be troublesome thanks to inter-region anomalies. "The last five games I got were *Boxxle II, Brainbender, Jurassic Park 2, Altered Space* and *Cutthroat Island*," reveals Mat. "And three of those were German-only releases, so they took some time to track down. I lucked out on some of the rarer region exclusives early on, such as *Hammerin' Harry And Darkman*."

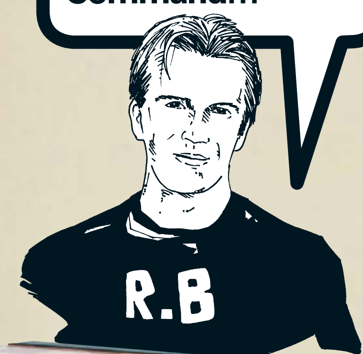
It isn't just the original Game Boy that has secured Mat's affections. He also owns every one of the machine's latter iterations, including a Virtual Boy. "I think it's an odd little machine. It's not got many great games, but its visual aesthetic is really cool, and you can look at it and think, 'What if?'" But it's the Game Boy where Mat's collecting endeavours mainly lie – so what advice would he give to anyone thinking about collecting for the popular handheld?

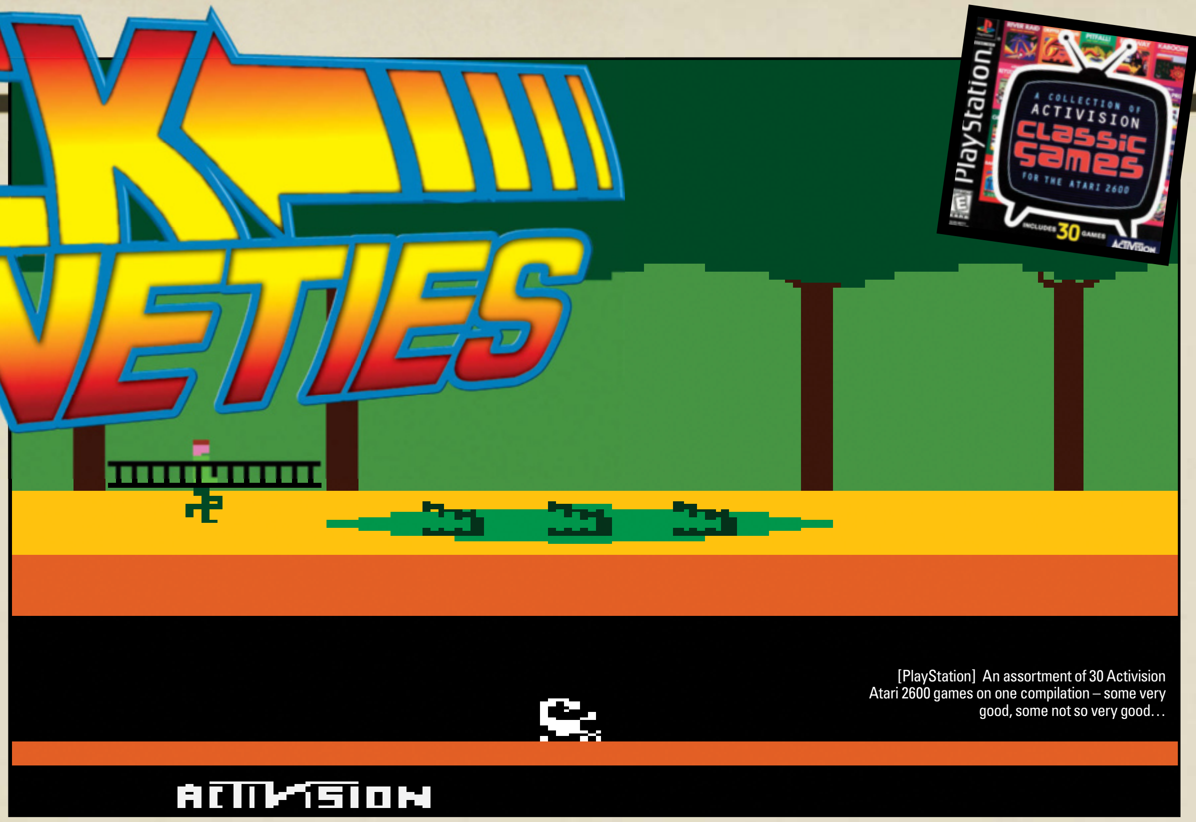
"Cart collecting is the way to go as boxed games can be insanely priced. Because people kept their games in cases with the Game Boy, the boxes often got lost. Also take your time as going out and buying everything in a short period of time is not only going to be incredibly expensive, but you'll also have no attachment to your collection." *

**To see more of Mat's collection, check out his youtube channel: youtube.com/user/Boyographic.**

# BACK TO THE NINETIES

**OCTOBER 1998 – SNK have a monochrome day, Nintendo see red (and blue), Atari throws down the Gauntlet (again), Spyro The Dragon is hot stuff while Activision go retro. Richard Burton displays perfect Chopper Command…**




[PlayStation] An assortment of 30 Activision Atari 2600 games on one compilation – some very good, some not so very good…

# THE LATEST NEWS FROM OCTOBER 1998

SNK was celebrating a new addition to its family with the arrival of the Neo-Geo Pocket. It was the first handheld console released by the company, bafflingly it had a monochrome screen which many saw as a backwards step compared to its recently released competitor: the Game Boy Color.

Disappointingly it suffered lacklustre sales and was discontinued early into 1999 with only ten games released albeit prominent titles such as *Neo-Geo Cup '98*, *Samurai Shodown* and *King Of Fighters R-1*. SNK reacted quickly and soon released a replacement console five months later: the Neo-Geo Pocket Colour and while the Neo-Geo Pocket was a Japanese exclusive, the Pocket Colour retailed worldwide.

The Game Boy was about to get a massive boost with the North American release of *Pokémon Red And Blue*. Japan had already seen its release a mere two and a half years earlier while Europeland would have to wait another full year. The aim of the games was to become a *Pokémon* master by winning the Pokémon League. This was no small feat and would involve beating eight Gym Leaders, the Elite Four and the current champion. Alternatively you could play the collecting side of *Pokémon* which involved finding all 150 Pokémon characters and completing the Pokédex.

A nice touch was that to complete the Pokédex you would need to trade Pokémon with a buddy playing the other game via the Nintendo link cable. While battling and winning was all part of the game, the real draw for younger gamers was the collecting element that really resonated with them.

*Pokémon* changed the fortunes of Nintendo and the Game Boy. *Pokémon Red And Blue* have racked up sales of 23-and-a-half million units becoming the best-selling RPG on the Game Boy.

LucasArts had a new distinctive and original yet dark and humorous graphical adventure out and its name was *Grim Fandango*. You play as the deceased Manny Calavera who works a sort of a travel agent for the recently deceased.

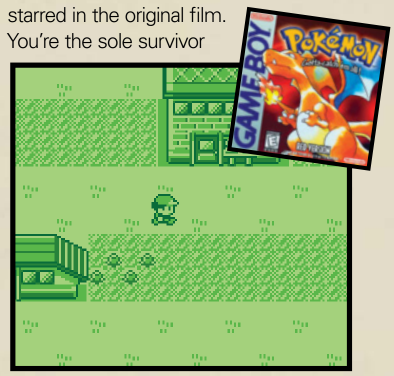
You solve puzzles, utilise objects and chat with other characters to help you on your undead adventure. The graphics were delightfully stylised in design with the backgrounds static and pre-rendered while the characters were overlaid in 3D and the gameplay flowed flawlessly. The original soundtrack, a beautifully eclectic mix of jazz, swing and big band only made it better. Inexplicably it was a surprising commercial flop. Bizarre as *Grim Fandango* was fantastic.

New to arcades this month was *Gauntlet Legends* from Atari, a simultaneous four-player dungeon crawler with a whiff of RPG and a splash of hack-and-slash.

One very welcome feature to *Gauntlet Legends* was the password and character save game feature. You could delve deep into the dungeons at your own pace without having to complete it in one sitting. Characters could also be improved and levelled up as you progressed. *Gauntlet Legends* played well, looked great and kept that retro flavour of the 1985 original.

*Trespasser*, the *Jurassic Park* spin-off game developed by Dreamworks Interactive and published by Electronic Arts for PC boasted the involvement of Steven Spielberg and the voice acting talents of Richard Attenborough, who starred in the original film. You're the sole survivor




[Game Boy] *Pokémon Red* and *Blue* arrive on the Game Boy and a seismic shift in Nintendo's fortunes follows.

# THIS MONTH IN…

## COMPUTER AND VIDEOGAMES

With the Dreamcast launch just a month away *C&VG* featured a key game for the system: *Sonic Adventure*, a 3D platformer with action and adventure overtones. With six playable characters you must stop Dr Eggman obtaining the Chaos Emeralds and feeding them to Chaos.




## GAMEPRO

*GamePro* inspected the DexDrive by InterAct for the N64 and PlayStation, a console memory card reader which allowed transfer of files to PC. Game data can then to be inspected via the proprietary software, DexPlorer. It was essentially a mass storage solution should you have a mountain of memory cards.




## CU AMIGA

*CU Amiga* was the world's best-selling Amiga magazine at the time yet EMAP still couldn't turn a profit on the much-loved periodical and as such the October 1998 issue was to be the last. Memorably, it sported a fetching upside down cover with a *Monty Python*-esque foot squashing the logo.




of a plane crash and must make your escape from the island by avoiding the dinosaurs and using your survival skills.

*Trespasser* was an ambitious project which, inadvertently, may have been its downfall. Case in point was the dinosaur artificial intelligence. Every dinosaur was animated purely through its AI with nothing predetermined. They would learn, react and move appropriately to their conditions. While this sounded amazing in principal, reality unfortunately proved otherwise.



[PlayStation] Platform gaming got a shot in the arm this month with the ultra cute and equally enjoyable *Spyro*.

Time constraints caused the development of *Trespasser* to be rushed with corners cut. One area that suffered badly was the aforementioned AI. Dinosaurs moved awkwardly and generally looked unnatural in their behaviour and movements.

Reviewers loathed *Trespasser* and it was panned universally. It was bug-ridden, it operated slowly and its gameplay was tedious and glitchy with terribly slow frame-rates. In fact, it won several 'Worst Game Of 1998' awards.



[Arcade] A classic is rejuvenated for coin-op duty in the form of *Gauntlet Legends*.

Platform gamers rejoiced with the release of *Spyro The Dragon* on PlayStation. You control Spyro and you're tasked with travelling across the various stages collecting treasure, saving your fellow dragons and ultimately defeating your foe, the Gnasty Gnorc.

*Spyro The Dragon* played across six substantial worlds in lovingly crafted 3D landscapes that looked and played similar in style to *Super Mario 64*. Spyro had a lot going for it; excellent graphics, a soundtrack composed by Stuart Copeland and playability by the bucket load. As such, it impressed reviewers and gamers and deservedly so.

Continuing the trend for retro gaming compilations, it was the turn of Activision to re-release the best of its Atari 2600 back catalogue on the PlayStation. *Activision Classics* was a 30-game selection pack featuring such titles as *River Raid*, *H.E.R.O.*, *Pitfall!*, *Enduro* and *Chopper Command*.

Sadly, the retro gaming reverie you indulged in regarding those wood-grained console memories of old would lead you to discover that many of the games on the compilation aren't actually that much cop at all. Some classics? Yes. Quite a lot of filler? Yes again. *

## NEWS OCTOBER 1998

3 October saw Roddy McDowall, the British actor who is often remembered for playing Cornelius in the *Planet Of The Apes*, die at the age of 70 from lung cancer.

23 October would see the debut single from Britney Spears, *…Baby One More Time*, become the biggest-selling single of 1998 shifting in excess of nine million copies.

Amongst the multitude of album releases this month the stand out titles were *Gran Turismo* (The Cardigans), *IV* (Cypress Hill), *You've Come A Long Way, Baby* (Fatboy Slim) and *I've Been Expecting You* (Robbie Williams) and.

23 October also saw the UK release of the movie *Small Soldiers*. The sci-fi action flick sees two groups of sentient action figures doing battle after the creators inadvertently use a super powerful microprocessor AI chip in the toys production, a chip originally intended for military use. Cue lots of CGI fighting…

29 October saw the Space Shuttle Discovery launch from the Kennedy Space Centre in Florida with aging astronaut John Glenn aboard. Glenn was the first American astronaut to orbit the Earth in the Friendship 7 capsule in 1962 and became the oldest person to go into space at the age of 77.

Although his nine-day mission was seen as a publicity stunt for NASA, the official line was he was the Payload Specialist and was to have a series of experiments performed on him while in orbit. Glenn himself stated that he pestered NASA for two years to use him as a "guinea pig for geriatric studies".

# CHARTS

## OCTOBER 1998

### PLAYSTATION




1 Colin McRae Rally (Codemasters)
2 Gran Turismo (Sony)
3 FIFA World Cup 98 (Electronic Arts)
4 Premier Manager 98 (Gremlin)
5 Tomb Raider: Platinum (Eidos)

### NINTENDO 64



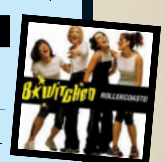
1 Banjo Kazooie (Nintendo)
2 FIFA World Cup 98 (Electronic Arts)
3 GoldenEye 007 (Nintendo)
4 Diddy Racing Kong (Nintendo)
5 Cruis'n World (Nintendo)

### PC




1 Cannon Fodder (Sold Out)
2 X-Files: The Game (Electronic Arts)
3 Commandos: Behind Enemy Lines (Eidos)
4 FIFA World Cup 98 (Electronic Arts)
5 Premier Manager 98 (Gremlin)

### MUSIC




1 Rollercoaster (B*Witched)
2 Girlfriend (Billie)
3 I Don't Want To Miss A Thing (Aerosmith)
4 Gym And Tonic (Spacedust)
5 Perfect 10 (Beautiful South)




[PC] Graphically, point-and-click adventures rarely tick all the right boxes. *Grim Fandango* did but it didn't sell that well.

retro GAMER.net READER'S REVIVAL





# Cotton: Fantastic Night Dreams

"WE HAVE FIVE WITCHES AND A NEWT, WE SHOULD BE ABLE TO DO SOMETHING!"

#93

» SUCCESS » NEO-GEO POCKET COLOR » 2000

***Cotton* (or *Cotton: Fantastic Night Dreams*, to give the game its wonderful full title) is a horizontal shoot-'em-up with a charming main character, who is a witch – the eponymous Cotton. She has an arsenal of magic to help her fend off the nightmarish (but oh-so-cute) creatures that attack her throughout the game. Also lending a hand is a fairy named Silk who flies around and also shoots at your command, effectively working as an 'option'.**

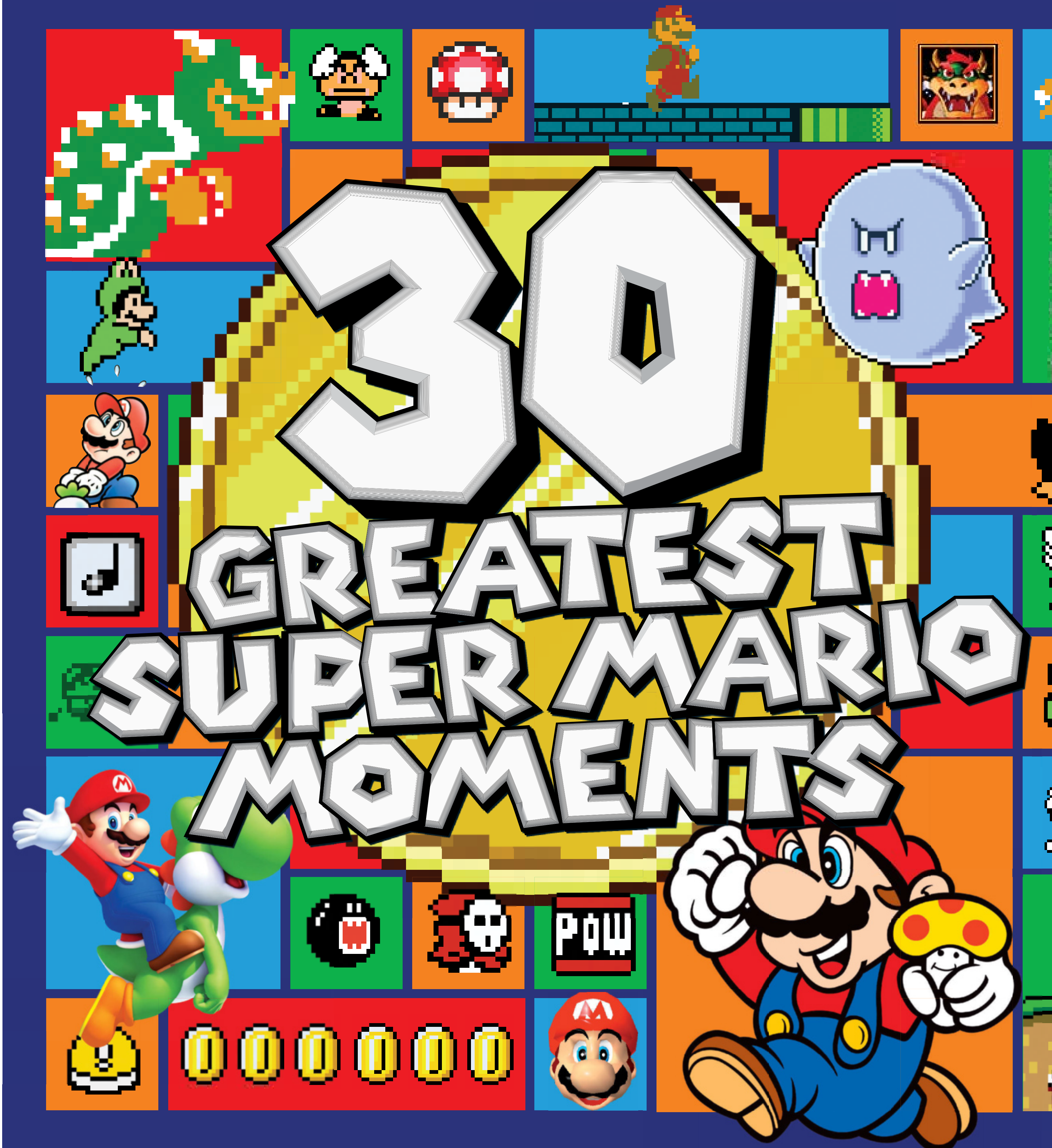
The power-up system of *Cotton* is worthy of praise – how many times have you cursed a great shoot-'em-up's design after dying once and losing all your hard-earned power-ups? This won't happen in *Cotton*, as you'll drop one level in power when you croak. The price for this leniency is that each power-up you collect only adds to a sort of experience bar, with each level requiring more of the yellow crystals to fill it. The yellow crystals also double as extra weapon ammo: shoot them a couple of times and they'll turn red or blue, giving you access to a flame or lightning spell respectively.

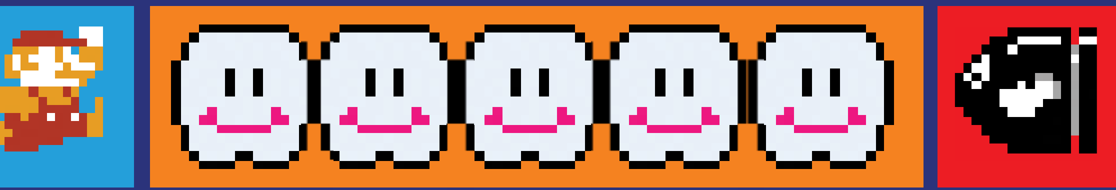
For such a small screen the graphics are excellent, with lovely detail, and a fair amount of enemies on the screen. The sound is awful, though, but this is a problem which is down to the Neo-Geo Pocket Color's weak sound rather than the game itself.

*Cotton* certainly can't compare to the original arcade version, but it plays excellently (bar the odd difficulty spike) if you enjoy shoot-'em-ups. Beware, though: this game can set you back a few quid online, due to its scarcity. And no, you can't have my copy!

**CHRIS MURPHY**

# 30 GREATEST SUPER MARIO MOMENTS









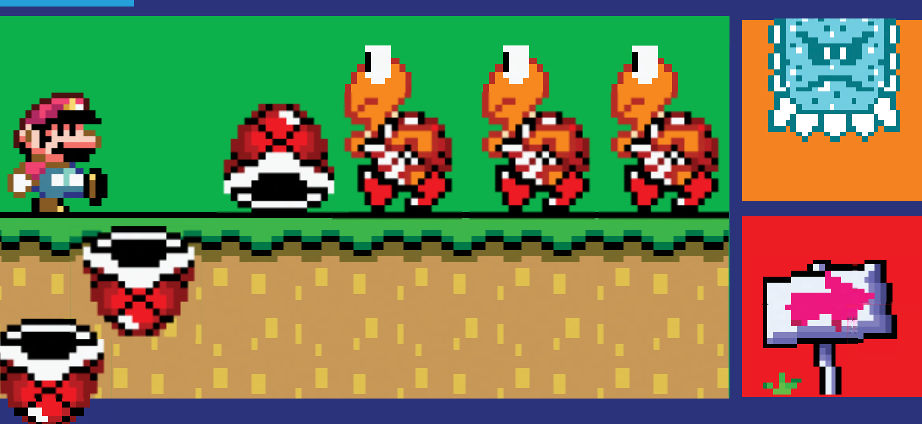
# The Super Mario Bros. series has been defining gaming for 30 years. We've selected 30 of your favourite moments from the series and asked developers to share their memories about the evergreen franchise

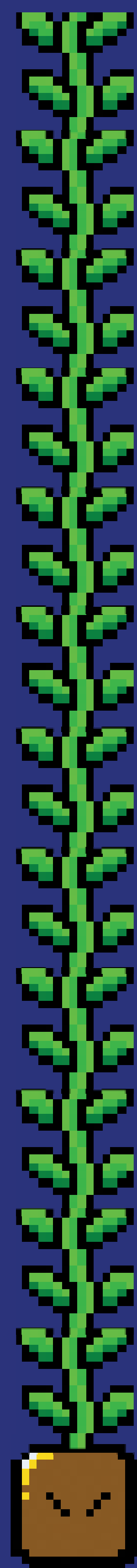


**Mario is easily one of gaming's most iconic and recognisable figures. While he's been around since 1981 in the** guise of Jumpman, it wasn't until he became super in 1985 that gamers really started to take notice of the mustachioed plumber.

When Shigeru Miyamoto created *Super Mario Bros.* he also effectively recreated the platformer, creating a template that would not only shape the later *Mario* games for many years, but also platformers in general. Nintendo would again change the goalposts in 1996 with *Super Mario 64* and while other contenders have come close, no current developer is making 3D platformers that can compete with the likes of *Super Mario Galaxy* and *Super Mario 3D World*, in short Mario is the king at what he does and it's a fact that's unlikely to change any time soon.

But we've covered Mario's history in the past (in issue 82 no less) so for his 30th anniversary we instead wanted to look at why the *Super Mario Bros.* series is so popular with gamers. There's a reason why *Super Mario* games have sold nearly 300 million sales and it's because they're some of the most inventive and well-designed games of their genre. But don't just take our word for it, the following moments are some of your favourites and we've also persuaded a large number of classic developers to share their personal memories too. Here's to another 30 years of everyone's favourite plumber.





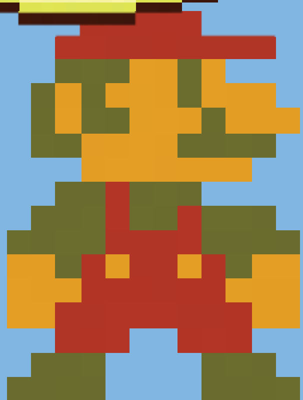
## DEFINITIVE SUPER MARIO BROS. TIMELINE

The games Nintendo considers to be part of the series

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **SUPER MARIO MAKER** | NINTENDO WII U | 2015 |
| **SUPER MARIO 3D WORLD** | NINTENDO WII U | 2013 |
| **NEW SUPER MARIO BROS. U** | NINTENDO WII U | |
| **NEW SUPER MARIO BROS. 2** | NINTENDO 3DS | 2012 |
| **SUPER MARIO 3D LAND** | NINTENDO 3DS | 2011 |
| **SUPER MARIO GALAXY 2** | NINTENDO WII | 2010 |
| **NEW SUPER MARIO BROS. WII** | NINTENDO WII | 2009 |
| **SUPER MARIO GALAXY** | NINTENDO WII | 2007 |
| **NEW SUPER MARIO BROS.** | NINTENDO DS | 2006 |
| **SUPER MARIO SUNSHINE** | GAMECUBE | 2002 |
| **SUPER MARIO 64** | NINTENDO 64 | 1996 |
| **SUPER MARIO LAND 2: 6 GOLDEN COINS** | GAME BOY | 1992 |
| **SUPER MARIO WORLD** | SUPER NINTENDO | 1990 |
| **SUPER MARIO LAND** | GAME BOY | 1989 |
| **SUPER MARIO BROS. 3** | NES | |
| **SUPER MARIO BROS. 2** | NES | 1988 |
| **SUPER MARIO BROS.: THE LOST LEVELS** | NES | 1986 |
| **SUPER MARIO BROS.** | NES | 1985 |




# WORLD 1-1 Super Mario Bros.



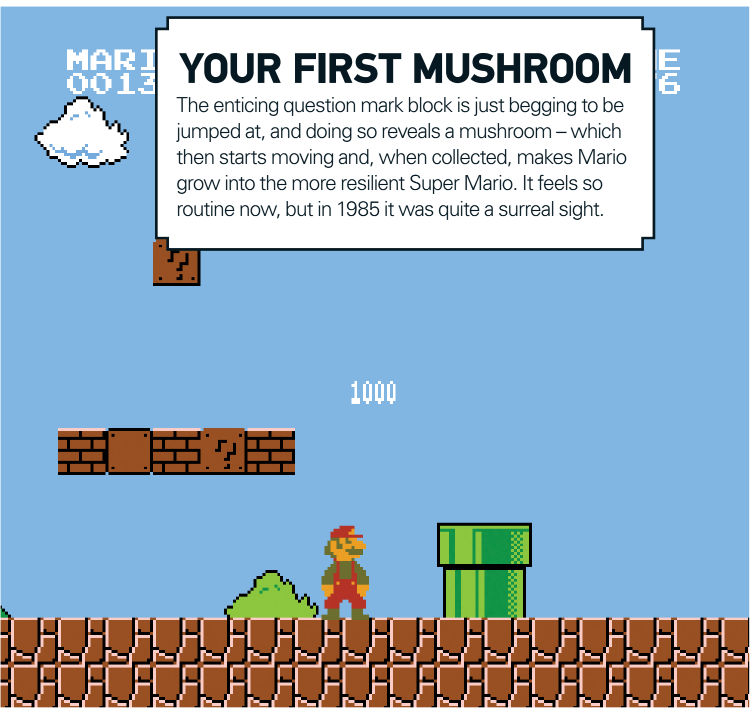
There's nothing like your first time. As your finger jabs the rubbery start button of the controller, the screen goes dark and you're presented with a title card for World 1-1. You hear those first notes of the game's theme – a tune that will be etched upon your memory forever – and proceed into the first stage of *Super Mario Bros.*.

To this day, very few first stages do as good a job of equipping the player as that of *Super Mario Bros.*. The game doesn't need a wordy tutorial, because the level design does a great job of naturally creating curiosity and teaching the player about various game elements. All objects are placed on the right of the starting screen, encouraging you to move forward. Blocks bearing question marks draw attention to themselves, inviting the player to interact. The Goomba looks mean and advances towards Mario, making a confrontation of some kind inevitable.

World 1-1 contains enough challenge to make a player feel accomplished in victory, but is gentle enough that even a small child can finish it with a little practice. You'll play through it enough times to remember it by heart and learn to finish it in under a minute, but it never gets old because this first level *is Super Mario Bros.*.

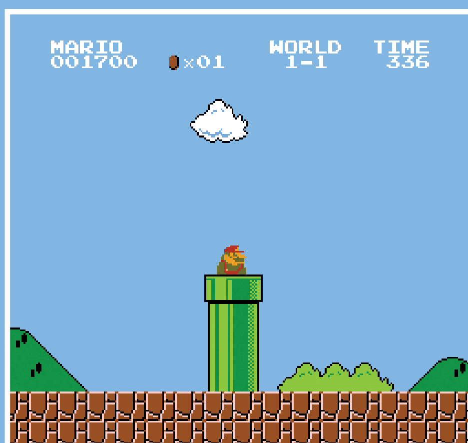


"My favorite is the arcade version of [*Super*] *Mario Bros.* that I first saw. This game had numerous jaw-dropping moments for me that nowadays we take for granted, like a smoothly scrolling landscape. But what really blew me away was the moment I discovered I could enter certain green pipes and discover new areas. This simple feature made the entire *Mario* world seem vastly bigger and more mysterious to me. As children we're always fascinated by discovering caves and exploring what's inside them, and Mario captured that magic with the green pipes, each of which represented the possibility of an entirely new area to discover and explore. After that, secret areas became the norm in games, and I know in the Apogee and 3D Realms games I was involved in, we always tried to include as many secret area as we could. All because of *Mario Bros.*." **SCOTT MILLER, 3D REALMS**



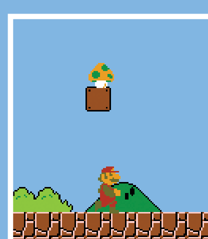

## YOUR FIRST MUSHROOM

The enticing question mark block is just begging to be jumped at, and doing so reveals a mushroom – which then starts moving and, when collected, makes Mario grow into the more resilient Super Mario. It feels so routine now, but in 1985 it was quite a surreal sight.




## YOUR FIRST PIPE JOURNEY

"Speeding through World 1-1 on *SMB* NES and getting that first running jump to get the full 1000 points on the flagpole, giving the feeling that you're off to a great start. Yeah right!" **SAMHAIN81**

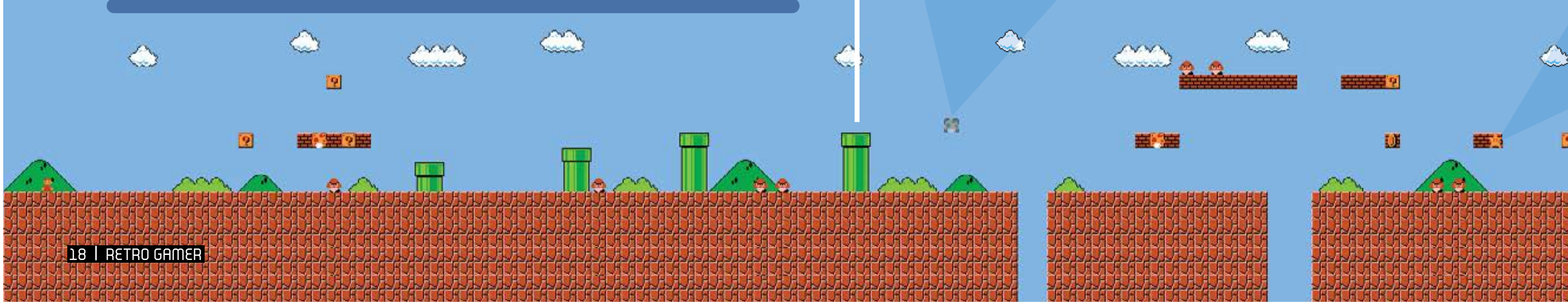


## YOUR FIRST SECRET

You might find the hidden extra life on your first attempt at World 1-1 – it's easy enough to accidentally find. However, what's important is that you probably won't. You can keep discovering new things in *Mario* games after you think you've mastered them, and this secret is the first indication of that.



"The best thing I've ever done is a *Mario* game has to be discovering the first Warp in *Super Mario Bros.* on the NES. Discovering a secret vine, which then allowed me to climb outside of the top of the level and run across the top of it was staggering. There were five other people in the room and we were all gobsmacked to discover the Warp Pipes. Back then, cheats and secrets felt far more valuable than they do today." **ALEX WARD, CRITERION**





“It shouldn’t come as any surprise that, as a game creator, my reaction to a game might be different from that of your average game player. The early *Mario* games on the NES bear this out.

My first reaction to *Mario* was surprise that the game so obviously used character-mapped background graphics. Shigeru Miyamoto made a conscious decision to build Mario’s world out of blocks. In doing so, he allowed for a very large world due to memory efficiencies, but it represented a step backward in videogame imagery. He took a big risk. As *Super Mario Bros.* was the flagship game franchise that everyone would associate with the NES system itself, the risk was that gamers would consider the NES to be inferior hardware to machines of the day providing much more realism.

As it played out, the game overcame the risks involved. Using character-mapping the world could be much larger and the gameplay experience more richly rewarding. Players thought of the colorful, blocky game backgrounds as more of a fantasy art-direction than a technical limitation, and the gameplay was the star anyway.”

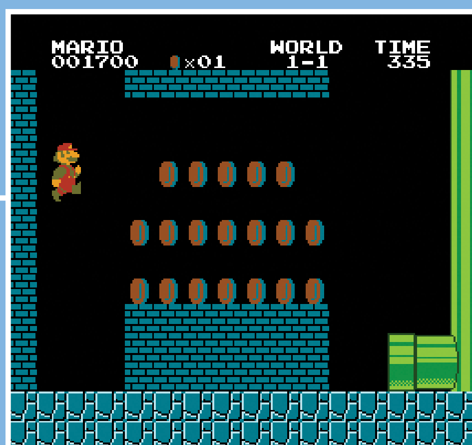
**DAVID CRANE, ACTIVISION**



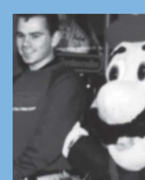

## YOUR FIRST FLAGPOLE

Even when your first moment of victory is in sight, there’s one last challenge as you try to jump to the top of the flagpole for more points. If you’re lucky, you might even get some fireworks after lowering the flag! It’s a smart and iconic bit of game design.



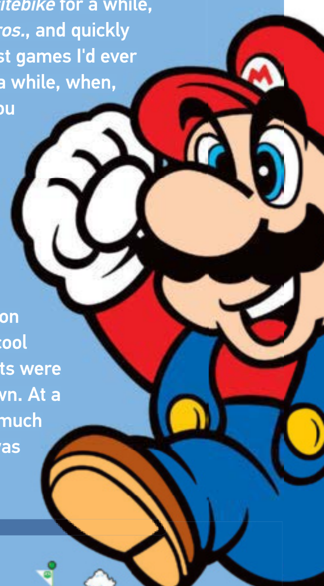



As a plumber, it makes sense for Mario to hang around pipes. It doesn’t make quite as much sense for him to travel through them, but after the first time you travel down one and find a secret cache of coins, you’ll always check them for hidden rooms.



“My favourite *Mario* moment comes from what I believe was my first session playing the game while visiting Activision when I was working at *ZZAP!64* back in late-1985 or very early-1986. It had a new imported NES and an American TV to play it on. I'd been playing *Excitebike* for a while, but then switched to *Super Mario Bros.*, and quickly realised that it was one of the coolest games I'd ever played. I'd been running around for a while, when, by sheer fluke, I discovered that if you pulled down on the joypad while standing on a certain pipe, Mario was transported to a different area. Sure, that's a standard thing these days, but back then, the feeling of discovery, and the realisation that there was another world under the one I was standing on was incredible: it made a seriously cool game even cooler. What more secrets were there to uncover? My mind was blown. At a time when most games didn't have much in the way of hidden stuff, it really was a revelation. What a game!”

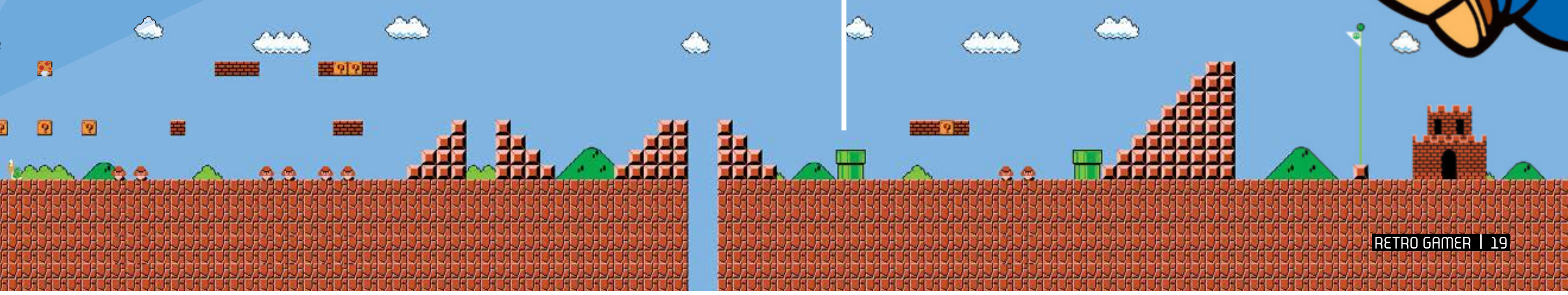
**JULIAN RIGNALL, JOURNALIST**





## YOUR FIRST STAR

When a flashing star is revealed for the first time you automatically imagine that it’s something pretty special – and this one doesn’t disappoint. Mario’s temporary invincibility turns him into a wrecking machine, capable of running straight through his foes without fear. It’s an amazing feeling of power.



## GOING OUT OF BOUNDS

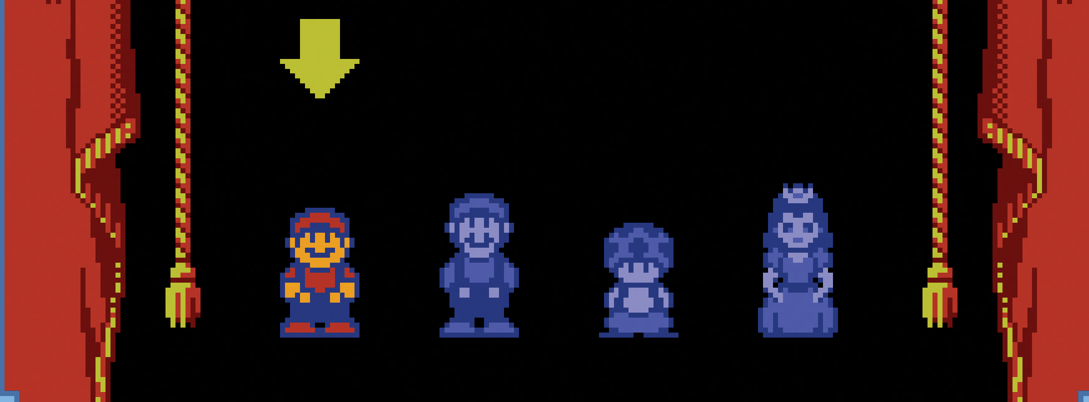
**AS SEEN IN: Super Mario Bros.**

2 Placing the ceiling of *Super Mario Bros.*' underground stages below the HUD was a genius move on Nintendo's part, as it makes it look like there's a fixed status bar. As a result, jumping out of the normal play area and running along the top of the screen feels like you're breaking the game – and better yet, if you can make it past the exit pipe you'll reach the Warp Zone.

## FOUR WAYS TO PLAY

**AS SEEN IN: Super Mario Bros. 2**

3 Not only does *Super Mario Bros. 2* let you play as Mario's friends, it makes doing so very worthwhile as every single one has unique characteristics. Luigi's a bit slower and weaker than Mario, but jumps higher. Toad has a short jump, but is fast and pulls up veggies quickly, while Peach (or Princess Toadstool) has a unique floating jump. It was a joy to discover which one suited you best.

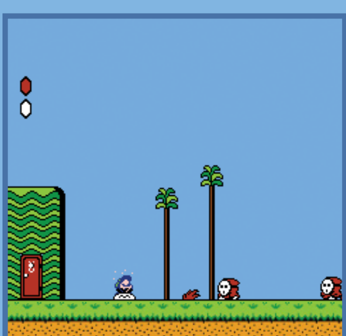




"In 1988, while working at Origin Systems, we had a Japanese Famicom system and I remember playing *Super Mario Bros. 2* on it – it was really cool to see Mario again but with blowing wind and leaves! It turns out this version never made it to the US because six months later *Super Mario Bros. 2* got to the States and it was the re-skinned *Doki Doki Panic* game (still awesome).

I also remember just how incredibly difficult World 8 was in *Super Mario Bros. 3*. The game was incredible, really a tour-de-force of game design, and was perfect in almost all respects. I finally beat it and count it as one of the hardest games I've played."

**JOHN ROMERO, ID SOFTWARE**



## WORKING THE SOIL

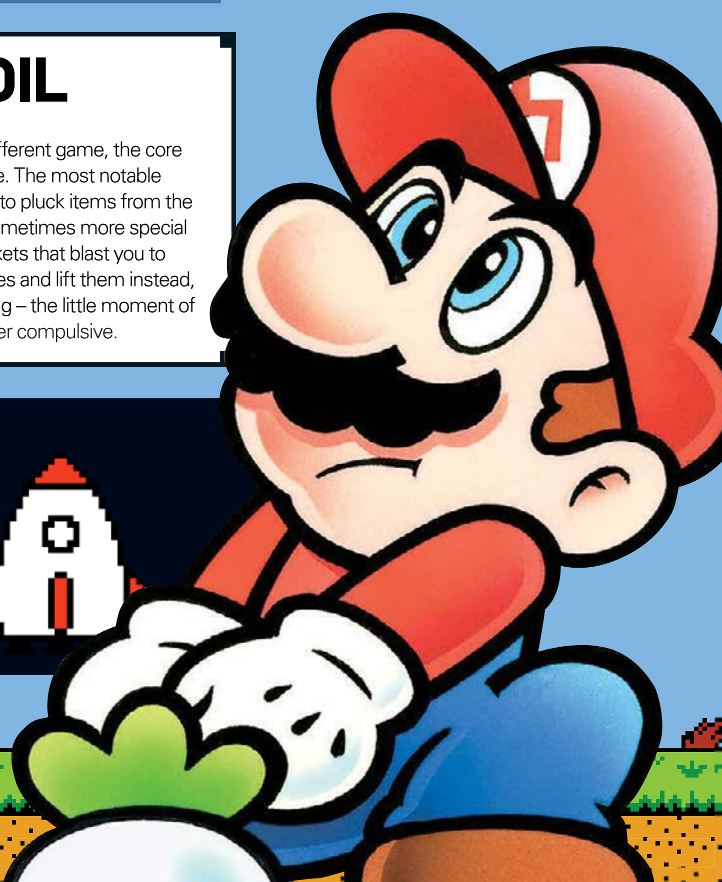
**AS SEEN IN: Super Mario Bros. 2**

4 Owing to *Super Mario Bros. 2*'s origins as a different game, the core gameplay changes a bit from the original game. The most notable new feature is the ability for Mario and friends to pluck items from the dirt – usually vegetables to be thrown at enemies, but sometimes more special items like potions that create doors into subspace or rockets that blast you to the next part of the game. Sure, you can jump on enemies and lift them instead, but even lobbing Shy Guys isn't as fun as a little gardening – the little moment of anticipation as each root is pulled makes the activity rather compulsive.

## PLUCK TALES

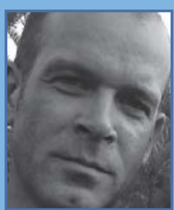
**Here are all the items you can retrieve from the ground in Super Mario Bros. 2**







“Oh man I’m not even sure how to pick one! I guess the first time I saw a Door Potion in *SMB2*. What a supremely weird game item!”
**ADAM SALTSMAN, ADAM ATOMIC**



“My memory has to be playing *Super Mario Land* on the Game Boy in 1989. This was my first *Mario* game, having worked at a games shop that decided to sell the Sega Master System – you weren’t allowed to sell Sega AND Nintendo – I had never seen a NES. I had my own Game Boy and this was the game I bought with it. After my first go I became aware of how well laid out and devious the levels were. Once I’d got used to [it] I realised that four hours had passed. I was well and truly addicted and the various tunes had been ingrained into my brain for all time. The game also succeeded at getting family members, who had shown no interest in my previous machine, the Spectrum, bopping baddies and exploring tunnels. A recent replay showed to me that the game had lost none of its playability and still had that ‘one more go’ factor that it had 26 years ago.”
**MARK R. JONES, OCEAN SOFTWARE**

## SUBMARINE ATTACK

**AS SEEN IN: Super Mario Land**

6 Gunpei Yokoi’s handheld *Mario* games offer a distinctive take on the design of the series, staying close to the original formula while introducing new mechanics. We always liked World 2-3, as Mario gets to hop in a submarine and blast away in a shoot-’em-up section. He gets to revisit this in the game too, this time taking to the skies in a plane!






## MALIGNANT MUSHROOMS

**AS SEEN IN: Super Mario Bros.: The Lost Levels**

5 Some of the cleverest moments in *Super Mario Bros.* involve subverting the player’s expectations, and this sequel did just that. In the original game, every mushroom was good – in *The Lost Levels*, you need to watch out for the Poison Mushrooms which damage you like an enemy attack.



“My favourite *Mario* moment is finding the Warp Zone at the end of 1-2. You thought you’d hacked the game! My least favourite moment, getting to 4-1 and finding Lakitu waiting with an inexhaustible supply of Spiny eggs to throw at you. I doubt it’s a coincidence the two are linked.”
**STEVE LYCETT, SUMO DIGITAL**






# TAKING TO THE AIR

**AS SEEN IN:** Super Mario Bros. 3

7

*Super Mario Bros.* might have given Mario power-ups, but *Super Mario Bros. 3* was the game that made us fall in love with them and the reason was found in the very first stage. After picking up a Super Leaf, Mario gains ears and a tail to become Raccoon Mario – not only making him cuter, but also granting him the ability to fly! It works just as you'd expect, too. Mario must be running at top speed before you hit jump to initiate flight, meaning that you need a long stretch of 'runway' to get going. However, Raccoon Mario (and later Tanooki Mario) can reach areas that are otherwise totally inaccessible, so you'll try to launch whenever possible. The ability to fly added a lot to *Super Mario Bros. 3*, and it's no surprise that flight has been frequently revisited as a theme since.

## FLIGHT ITINERARY

After taking to the skies for the first time, Mario decided that the airborne life suited him…

**SUPER LEAF**
From: Super Mario Bros. 3

**CAPE**
From: Super Mario World

**WING CAP**
From: Super Mario 64

**F.L.U.D.D.**
From: Super Mario Sunshine

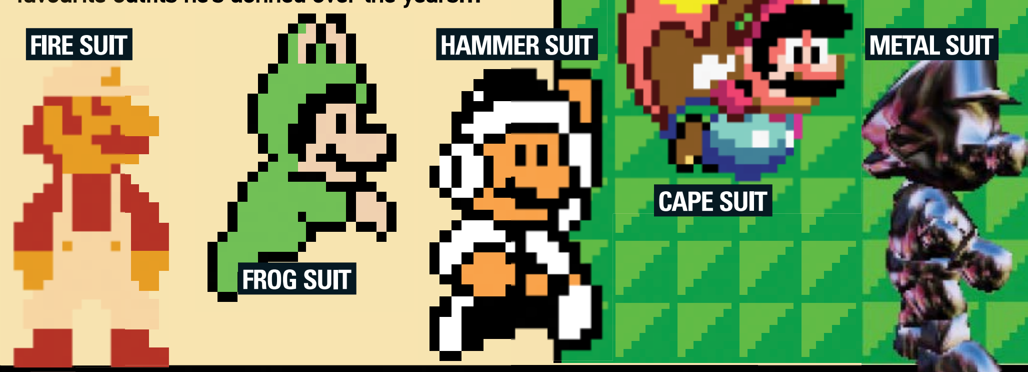
**BEE MUSHROOM**
From: Super Mario Galaxy



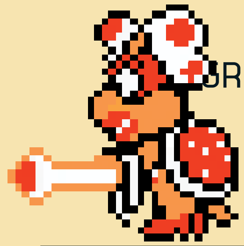

> **"*Super Mario Bros. 3*, the Tanooki suit. I played it for ages thinking it was a great attacking move before being shown by a neighbour how to fly. The rest of my *Mario 3* career was attempting to recreate this."**
> **BITTERTOAD**

## COSTUME PARTY

Mario just loves to dress up – here are some of our favourite outfits he's donned over the years…





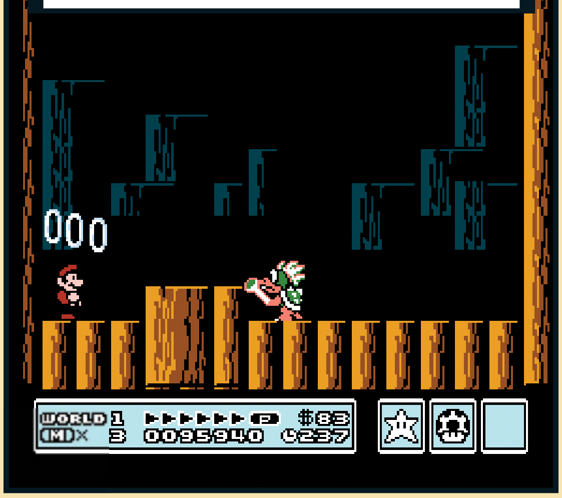


# MEETING THE FAMILY

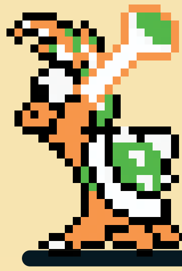
**AS SEEN IN:** Super Mario Bros. 3

8

After repeatedly being bested by Mario in the first game, Bowser learned the joys of delegation and decided to reserve himself as a final boss. He's a responsible villain, though – to ensure that Mario still had bosses to fight, he brought in the seven Koopalings to do his dirty work for him. We've got a fair amount of affection for the Koopa kids, and we're very pleased to see that they've returned to the series in recent years.




**“When you first fly with the racoon tail in *Super Mario Bros. 3* and realise how much of the game has opened up to you.”**
**FLYING_DELOREAN81**



# WHISTLE BLOWER

**AS SEEN IN:** Super Mario Bros. 3

9

Finding the warp zones in *Super Mario Bros.* is rewarding but obtaining warp whistles in *Super Mario Bros. 3* is even more so, especially because so few are available – just three in the whole game, and all of them within the first two worlds. Our favourite is the first. Find this white block in World 1-3, hold down on the D-pad for a couple of seconds, then run behind the scenery to the end of the stage!








**“While almost impossible to pick one *Mario* moment above all others, one that does hold a very special place is my first encounter with the Racoon (Tanooki) Suit in *Super Mario Bros. 3*. As a pixel pusher, the sheer joy of seeing such an iconic character as our titular plumber suddenly in a fuzzy onesie literally made me grin from ear to ear.**

**A great moment in a series of games that seldom fails to bring back the childlike gamer in even the oldest of dinosaurs.”**
**SIMON BUTLER, IMAGINE SOFTWARE**




# TOAD HOUSE

**AS SEEN IN:** Super Mario Bros. 3

10

With its new world map system, *Super Mario Bros. 3* opened the series up to between-level events. While we like the enemy encounter mini-stages, we were always much happier to see Toad's friendly face. Whether you were matching cards or simply picking items from a chest, the ability to get a quick break and stock up on items was always most welcome.

















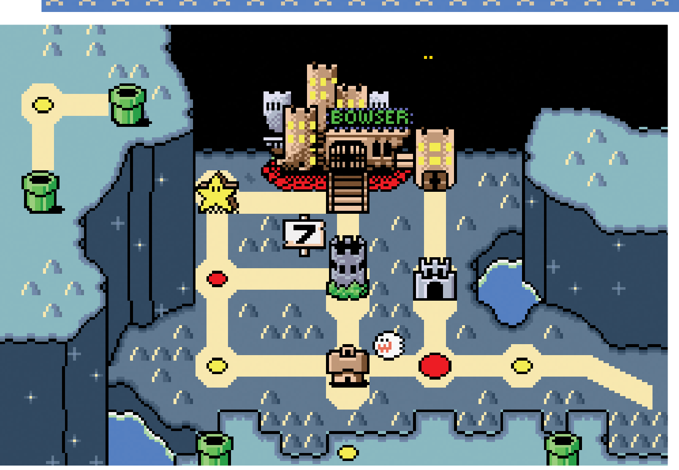

# THE WORLD MAP

**AS SEEN IN:** Super Mario World

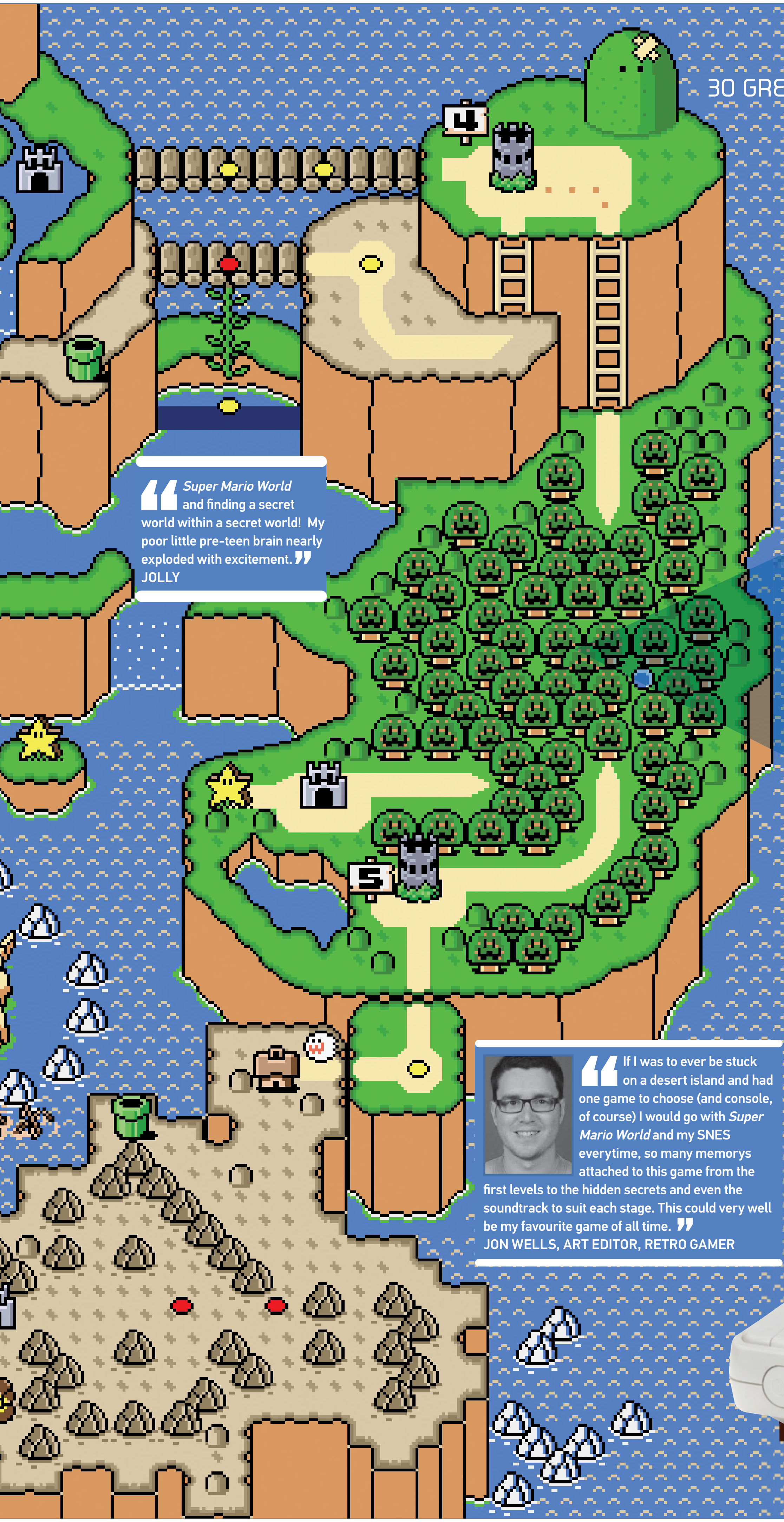
11

Sure, *Super Mario Bros. 3* had a world map too, but the one that guides you through Dinosaur Land in *Super Mario World* is a completely different beast. The maps in the previous game had generally been isolated, but after you make your way off Yoshi's Island, you'll get a true sense of the scale of the large, interconnected map of *Super Mario World*. This is also a map that changes and evolves as you journey through the game. Paths open up, bridges are built, Mario ventures into caves and forests – it feels almost alive, such is the level of activity.

The map isn't just well-presented, though. It's an incredibly useful tool for making your way through the game, thanks to the way it is set up. You can see the path you're supposed to take, but there's plenty of room left spare. Luckily, you'll soon find out that the red and yellow dots that represent stages mean something – the red levels have more than one exit, which gives you an idea of how to reveal the secret levels that occupy those seemingly empty areas of the map. But that's all the help the map will afford you, leaving the pleasure of discovery for the player to enjoy.





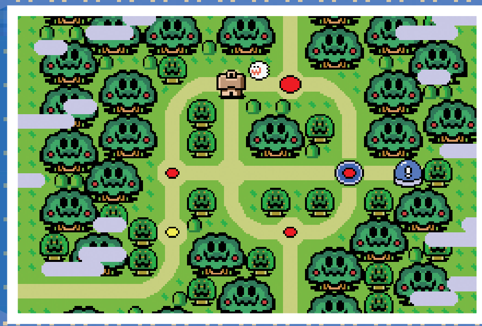
# SECRETS WITHIN SECRETS

**AS SEEN IN:** Super Mario Bros.

12



Making it to Star Road feels very special – the unusual stages and different coloured Yoshis certainly give its stages a different feel to those on the main map. However, the truly special moment comes when you realise that the rabbit hole goes deeper, as the Star Road stages have their own secret exits too! If you find all of them, you can take a trip to the super-secret Special Stages, which will challenge *Super Mario World* experts to the limit.






“*Super Mario World* and finding a secret world within a secret world! My poor little pre-teen brain nearly exploded with excitement.”
JOLLY

“If I was to ever be stuck on a desert island and had one game to choose (and console, of course) I would go with *Super Mario World* and my SNES everytime, so many memories attached to this game from the first levels to the hidden secrets and even the soundtrack to suit each stage. This could very well be my favourite game of all time.”
JON WELLS, ART EDITOR, RETRO GAMER



# SWITCH PALACE

**AS SEEN IN:** Super Mario World

13 As the first game in the series to let you revisit previously beaten stages, *Super Mario World* had to have a compelling reason to bring you back. The Switch Palaces are just that reason – when you find one, not only do you get to enjoy a room full of coins, you activate new blocks in old stages. These open up previously inaccessible paths, changing levels you thought you knew.



**"**As with many others, my favourite *Mario* Moment is from *Super Mario World*. It's the first time you entered an underground cave, and specifically how the soundtrack and effects went all echo-y. Don't ask me why that should've stayed with me above something as spectacular as the opening of *Mario 64*. I just remember it feeling really clever, that they'd thought about using audio to provide a sense of space and place... and that the SNES was able to pull it off. It was the moment that I knew I'd spent my money wisely, and was the start of my love affair with Nintendo.**"** **PAUL 'MR BIFFO' ROSE, DIGITISER 2000**





# MEETING YOSHI

**AS SEEN IN:** Super Mario World

14 The first time you see Yoshi hatch from an egg, you can tell immediately that he's going to be one of Mario's most popular allies. This cute green dinosaur might not look at home with the cast of *Jurassic Park*, but he's a fearsome force, able to swallow many enemies whole and spit them out as projectile attacks. Not only that, but he shields you, gives you the ability to perform a double-jump, and adds an excellent bongo track to the music.





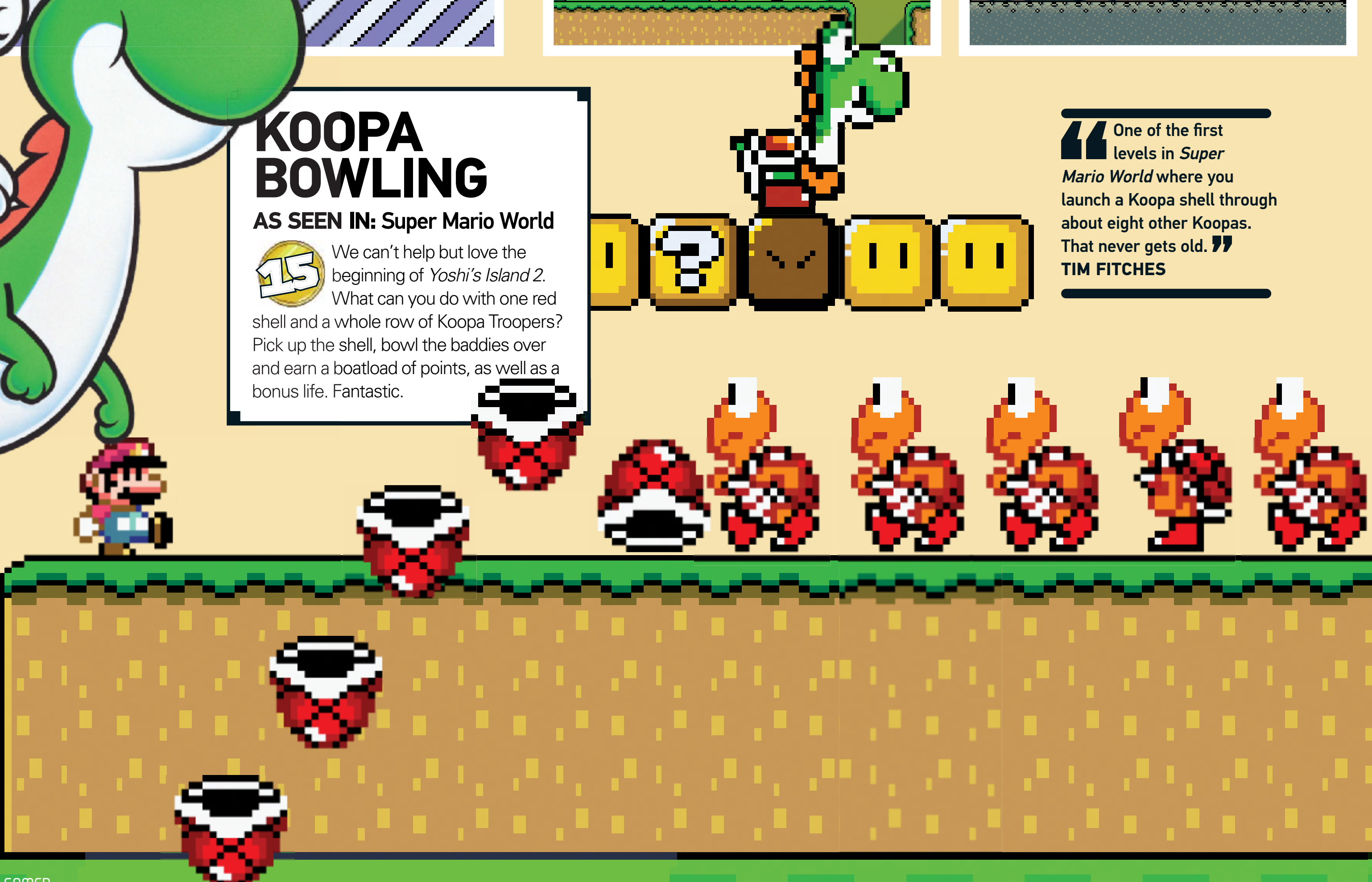


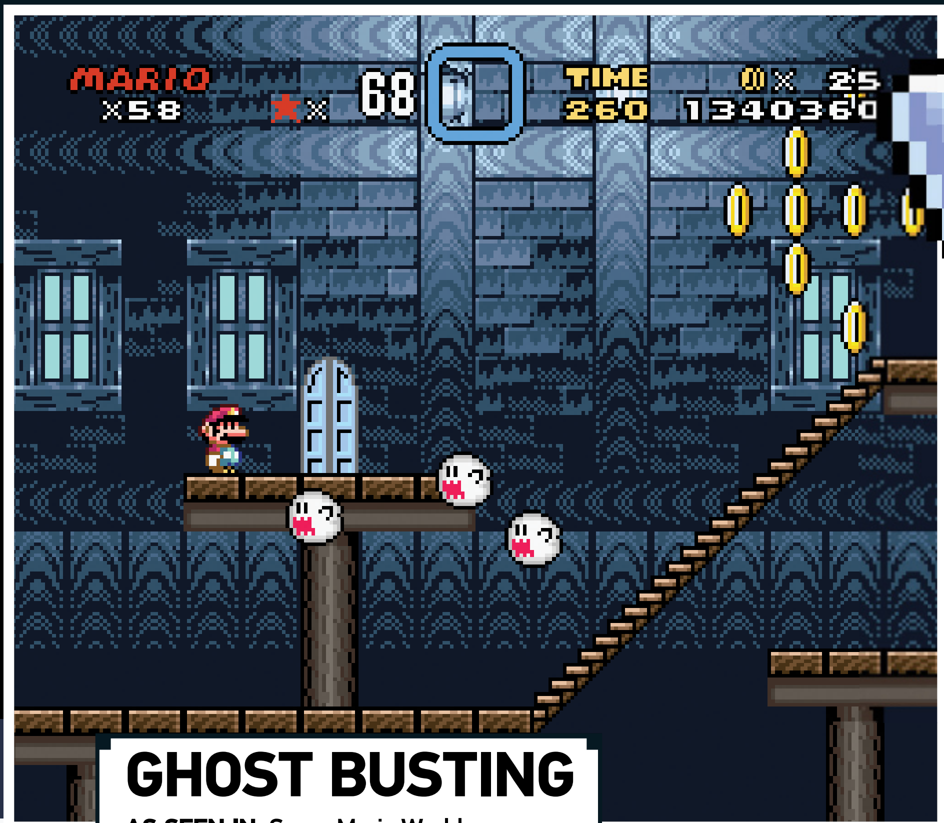
# KOOPA BOWLING

**AS SEEN IN:** Super Mario World

15 We can't help but love the beginning of *Yoshi's Island 2*. What can you do with one red shell and a whole row of Koopa Troopers? Pick up the shell, bowl the baddies over and earn a boatload of points, as well as a bonus life. Fantastic.

**"**One of the first levels in *Super Mario World* where you launch a Koopa shell through about eight other Koopas. That never gets old.**"**
**TIM FITCHES**






## GHOST BUSTING

**AS SEEN IN:** Super Mario World

16

Ghost Houses give you a break from action platforming, instead showing the versatility of the *Mario* formula by providing players with a mental challenge. From doors hidden behind unbreakable blocks to stages that seem to endlessly loop, the Ghost Houses throw all kinds of unusual challenges at you. Typically, the nature of the brainteasers means that you'll be more threatened by the clock than the slow-moving, shy Boos that populate these stages.



"I could tell you of the time I completed *Super Mario World* on the Super Famicom. It was entirely in Japanese, which meant I didn't know you could throw shells straight up in the air. That resulted in me having to go and get a cape, then make it all the way through the last level without getting hit. On the final screen, things got really tricky. You had to get a Koopa to drop at one side of the screen whilst you made it to the other. Then there was just enough room to run and get up to flight speed, at which point you had to jump and, on the way up, hit the Koopa and grab his shell at the same time. Then you could sail over the top of Bowser and drop the shell on him as normal. Rinse, repeat. Without getting hit - otherwise you'd lose your cape and have to go back to the previous level…"

**ALEX TROWERS, BULLFROG**

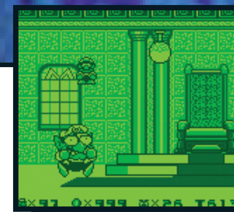


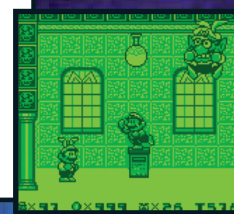

# MARIO'S DARK SHADOW

**AS SEEN IN:** Super Mario Land 2: 6 Golden Coins

17

While meeting Wario is one of the franchise's most understated moments, it's nevertheless an important one, even if players didn't really know it at the time. When you first encounter him in *Super Mario Land 2* it's as a solid antagonist for the popular plumber, with the portly villain effortlessly standing in for Bowser. He crops up again in several other games, only to become the main protagonist in *Super Mario Land 3*. He then goes on to completely reinvent the mini-game genre with the excellent *WarioWare* series, while continually hassling Mario is numerous adventures, both platformers and otherwise. What a cad.







"It was late 1996, and a couple of us had bought *Mario 64* on import for our N64 consoles and we challenged each other to see how fast we could beat the game. It ended up being about three weeks for me. Anyway, I'd been playing it for a few hours at a time and in the early hours, one night with lights off, I was really 'in the zone', swimming Mario through an underwater cavern and he ran out of oxygen. He had a very poignant death animation, where he spluttered and then floated limp and lifelessly towards the surface with the camera pulling away from him. It was so sad, I almost cried. I was so emotionally connected to him and his quest. It was a very upsetting and emotional moment. It reminded me of the fact that even whilst the graphics are obviously cartoony and stylised, much like Snow White and Woody from *Toy Story*, it's possible to create fictional characters with really empathy and whilst we've all seen that with animated characters in films, it was the first time I'd felt it for a game character."

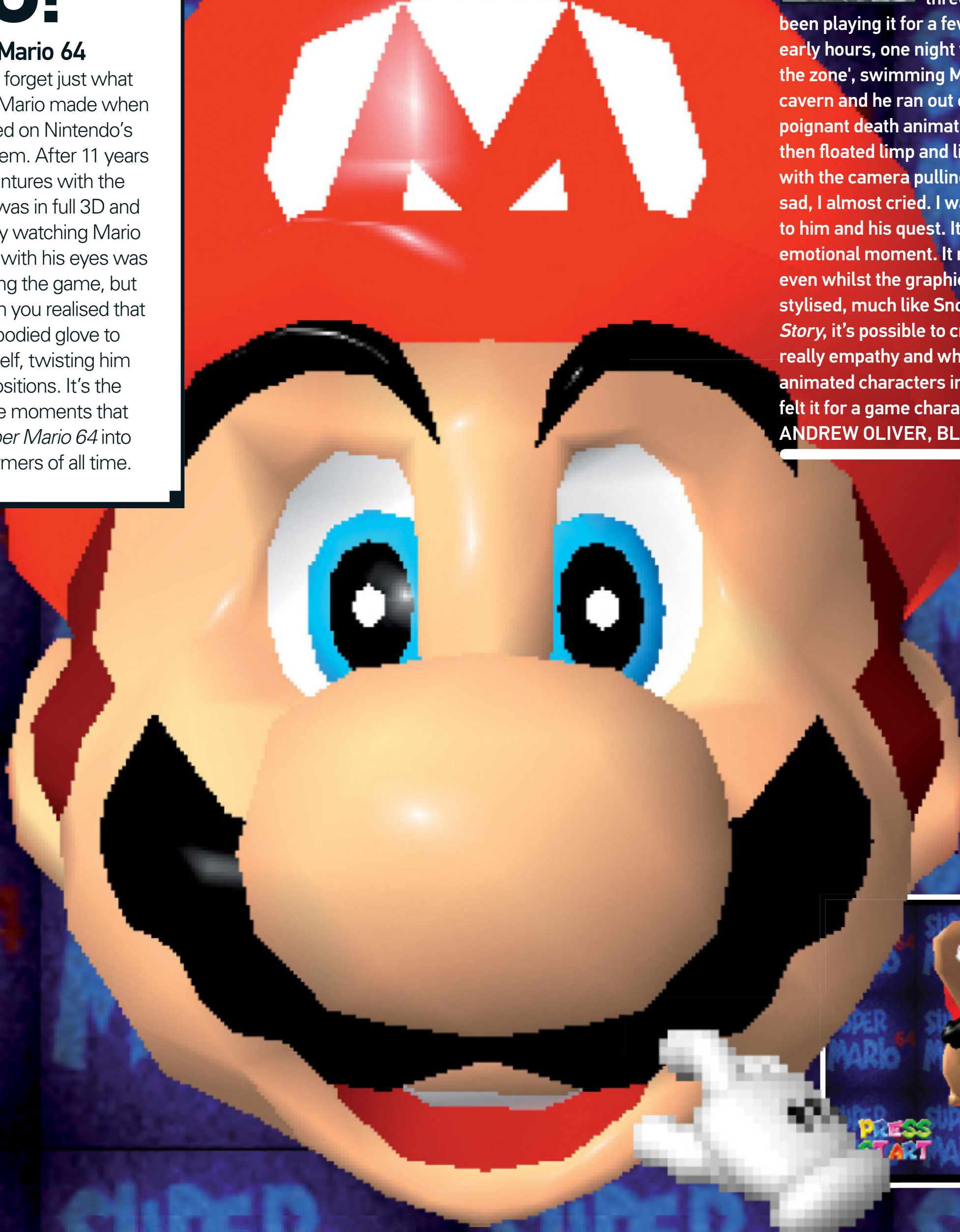
**ANDREW OLIVER, BLITZ GAMES**

# IT'S A ME! MARIO!

**AS SEEN IN:** Super Mario 64

18

It's easy to forget just what an impact Mario made when he appeared on Nintendo's 64-bit system. After 11 years of 2D adventures with the lovable plumber, here he was in full 3D and he looked fantastic. Simply watching Mario follow your cursor around with his eyes was a treat enough upon loading the game, but the real magic came when you realised that you could use that disembodied glove to actually pull at Mario himself, twisting him into all sorts of hilarious positions. It's the first of many unforgettable moments that would help transform *Super Mario 64* into one of the greatest platformers of all time.





"The first time I played *Mario 64* it just felt so revolutionary – Nintendo did such a great job of making the jump to 3D. Mario's control felt amazing – you could have fun just running around, sliding and jumping. It was just the perfect game to launch the N64 with – it looked, sounded and played great."

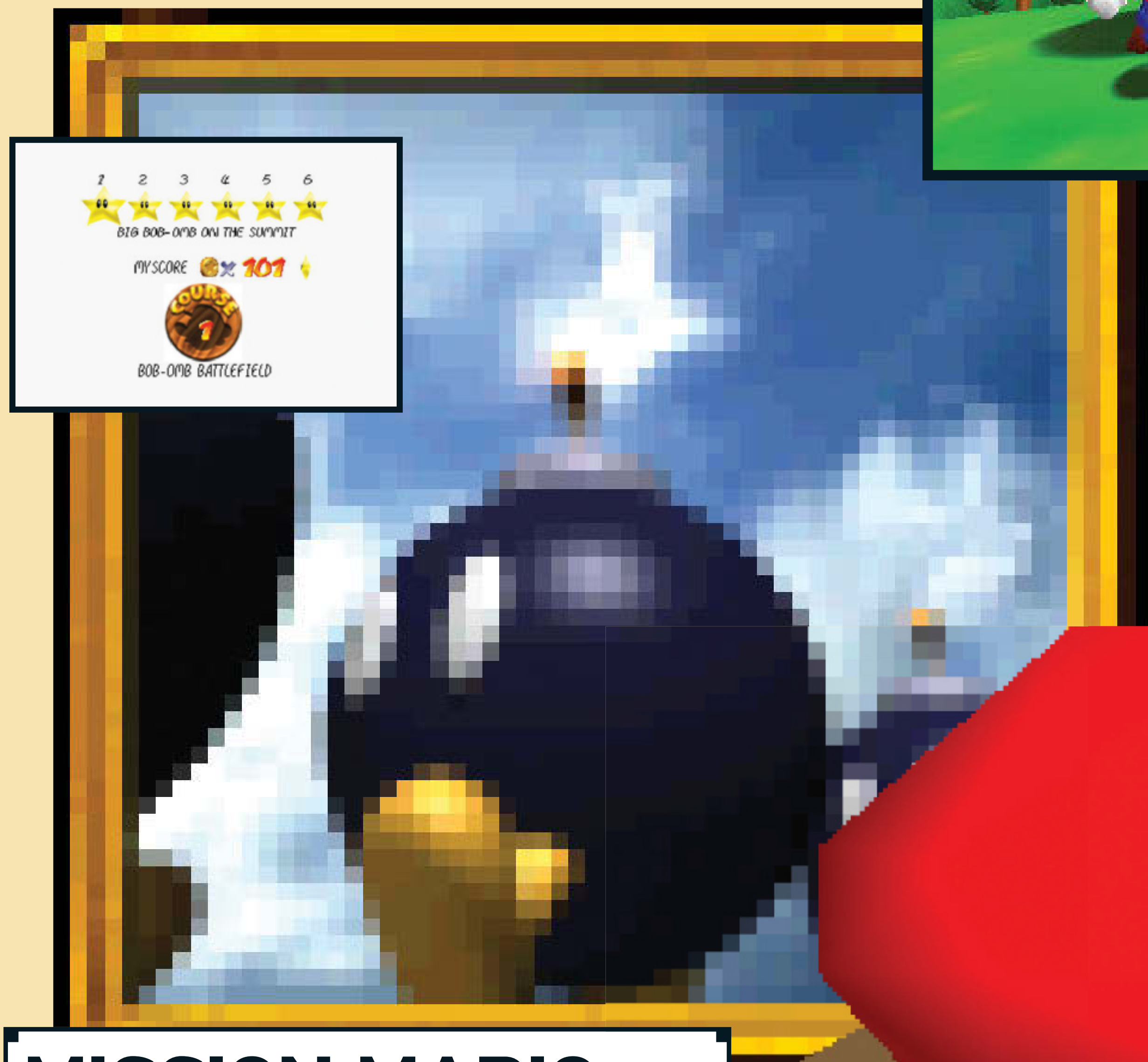
**JOHN PEGG, RARE**





"It's an interesting question, and there have been so many great moments in the Mario games that choosing one of them seems arbitrary and unfair to the others. For me, the real high point was those first few moments of playing *Super Mario 64*. Entering the third dimension, enjoying the intuitive controls. Running around outside the castle, seeing it all in 3D for the first time, trying out the different kinds of jumps, birds flying from trees as you climbed them. Realising that they had got so much so right on their first attempt and that it was going to be a great game to play. I can't think of another moment like that." **STEVE ELLIS, RARE**






"The first is the snow section on *Super Mario 64*. There are penguins around and the atmosphere of that whole area is top-notch. To cap it all, there is the ice racing section in there that is really a fun break from the jumping mechanic." **STEVE WETHERILL, ODIN SOFTWARE**

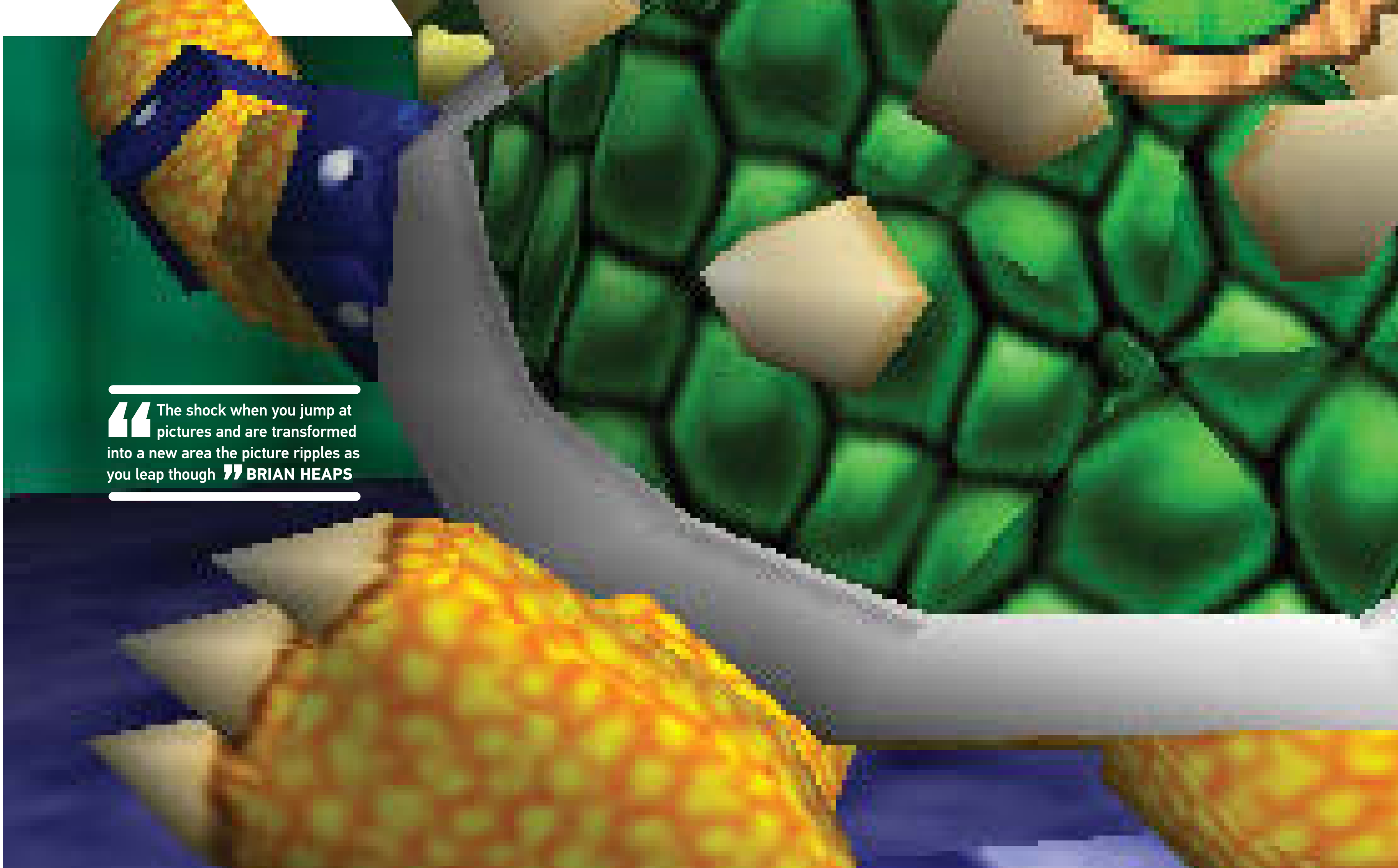
# MISSION MARIO

**AS SEEN IN:** Super Mario 64

19

*Super Mario 64* was a game changer. It not only redefined platformers for years to come, but also delivered a fresh new take on Mario's 11-year-old formula. It was magical enough to simply leap through a painting and discover an exciting new world within it, but *Super Mario 64*'s unique missions left an equally memorable impact, giving structure to the game and a sense of place that hadn't been in earlier games. The core mechanics were still there, but now you were racing penguins down slides, launching yourself into the ether in search of goodies and reuniting snowmen with their missing heads. In short you were having the time of your life.





> The shock when you jump at pictures and are transformed into a new area the picture ripples as you leap though
> **BRIAN HEAPS**

# BOWSER BY THE TAIL

**AS SEEN IN:** Super Mario 64

20

There are few moments in *Super Mario 64* — or any *Mario* game for that matter — that are as satisfying as your first encounter with Bowser. While he was always challenging in earlier games, he was never as menacing as he was in *Super Mario 64*. Being rendered in 3D not only made him imposing, but also gave a better indication of just how big the king of Koopas actually was. A further nice touch comes from the camera that shakes with every gigantic pound of Bowser's feet.

Still, the bigger they are the harder they fall and in *Super Mario 64*, Bowser falls very hard indeed. Initially he seems too powerful, thanks to his imposing size and the gigantic gouts of flame that he can spew out at will, but your 3D incarnation of Mario is super agile and before long you're able to confound the beast and get behind him.

Grabbing hold of Bowser's tail you slowly start swinging the surprised king, faster and faster, until he becomes a whirling dervish of green and yellow. "So long, dear Bowser," shouts Mario as he sends the king hurtling towards the mines that litter the stage. Four collisions later and the Kooper King is suitably cowed, leaving behind a gigantic key so Mario can continue his adventure.







> *Mario 64*. For me this was the first *Mario* game that really drew me into Mario's life perhaps because it was the first time the player actually got to feel as though there actually was a 'Mario World' somewhere in that machine.
>
> When *Mario 64* was released I think there were a lot of 'dark' and gloomy games that were becoming more and more popular, utilising 3D to create shooters. But playing *Mario 64* was a refreshing change, and showed us that games didn't have to be all *Doom* and gloom to be cool. It was such a cool game and inspired many others, myself included. I think that the feel of *Mario 64* inspired myself and a lot of the artists at Rare If you take a look at *Banjo-Kazooie* and *Diddy Kong Racing*, it's clear to see what we'd all been playing!
> **KEVIN BAYLISS, PLAYTONIC**

> Playing *Mario 64* for the first time wandering around the castle grounds, getting a feel for the analogue stick. Is there anyone who wasn't blown away by that?
> **DEATH'S HEAD**





"I played *Mario 64* in Japanese, on import before it was released in Europe. My most surprising moment was seeing someone else playing it in English some six months or so later. I was horrified how much description there was on how to find each Star – I had assumed this was some sort of story text. I had spent ages trying to find the last few stars!"
**DAVID BRABEN,**

## THE BIGGER THEY COME…

**AS SEEN IN:** Super Mario 64

**21** Although Shigeru Miyamoto had already dabbled with size distortion in *Super Mario Bros. 3*, it made a far bigger impact with the debut of Tiny-Huge Island. Unlike the other worlds of *Super Mario 64*, Tiny-Huge Island could be approached from two start points. One had Mario miniaturised, making the avoidance of piranha plants and goombas even more perilous, while the other turned the tables. Amazingly, despite the huge size difference, teeny weeny monsters would attack Mario with ferocious tenacity, making it even more satisfying when you mashed them underfoot with virtually no effort at all.







"I detested *Mario* when it first came out, the only *Mario* game I actually had any affinity with was *Mario 64*, I loved it, loved the look of it, loved the controls all of it. Running in 3D, Mario tilting ever so slightly as he ran, something *GTA IV* introduced to 'modern' gamers back in 2008. It was brilliant, but that's really my first and last love of things *Mario*." **STEWART GILRAY, JUST ADD WATER**








# MASTERING FLUDD

**AS SEEN IN:** Super Mario Sunshine

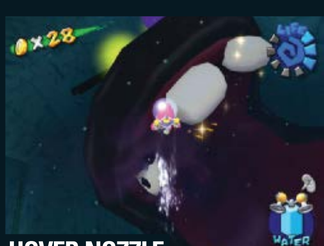
22

It's fair to say that a genre-defining game like *Super Mario 64* would be a particularly hard act to follow – just how do you make a sequel to one of the best games of all time? If you're Nintendo, you take the game in a new direction with the use of a versatile gadget. Whether he's cleaning graffiti off the walls of Isle Delfino or blasting the plaque off the teeth of an angry eel, Mario spends most of his time in the game using FLUDD.

The water-powered gadget initially serves Mario as an eco-friendly weapon, but by the end of the game you'll have encountered different nozzles which allow him to hover, blast into the air and run at speeds that would challenge even a certain blue hedgehog. These abilities allowed us to fling Mario around Delfino Island with the kind of speed and style we'd never had access to before.

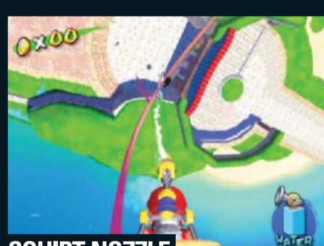


**"Although I'd played *Super Mario World* and *Mario 64* to their absolute limit, *Super Mario Sunshine* was the first in the series that I wanted to explore for all its worth. It had the three-dimensional splendour of *Mario 64*, plus the design intricacies of *Super Mario World*. Wherever I took Mario, I was usually rewarded, constantly memorising cool routes through the maps, practicing for coin runs at speed or to gain access to the next secret area. I can still remember where I found my final Blue Coin; it was such a moment of triumph. When I discovered that Yoshi was in there too, I was completely in love. While *Super Mario Galaxy* showed more overtly that Nintendo could still conceive whacky concepts that are fun for all to enjoy, in *Super Mario Sunshine* it proved that it was matchless for creating impeccably produced, masterfully designed worlds that came alive in the player's hands." PAUL DAVIES, JOURNALIST**



**HOVER NOZZLE**

■ With powerful twin jets of water, Mario can sustain mid-air flight for a few seconds. Not only does that let him cover gaps, it's also perfect for cleaning from above.



**SQUIRT NOZZLE**

■ A versatile attachment used for cleaning up graffiti, shooting at enemies, putting out fires and all manner of other tasks which require you to squirt water at things.



**TURBO NOZZLE**

■ If you've ever seen someone using a fire extinguisher to propel themselves, you'll know what's coming here – Mario uses a jetstream to sprint at high speeds.



**ROCKET NOZZLE**

■ If you need to reach high places and Mario's little legs won't push him far enough, one high-pressure blast of water will send you soaring into the stratosphere.



**“My moment comes from *Mario Sunshine* where you’re going about your merry way then Shadow Mario comes out from the ether and pinches your FLUDD just before you enter a level. I spent *ages* trying to beat that hidden level which is set in a void that exists somewhere *Mario 64* and *Sunshine*. I did finish it in the end, my palms were sweaty, my heart was beating and my GameCube controller was never the same…” DREW SLEEP, PRODUCTION EDITOR, RETRO GAMER**

# MEGA MUSHROOM!

**AS SEEN IN:** New Super Mario Bros.

23

Check any expectations of subtlety at the door – when Mario gets hold of a Mega Mushroom, he becomes so large that there’s only one reasonable course of action. In case you hadn’t guessed, that means going on an unstoppable rampage. Invincibility stars are great, but they just let you take out enemies. Mega Mario can smash through everything in his path, from enemies to scenery objects like blocks and pipes.

Of course, being Mega Mario doesn’t just feel great. There are some great touches to this too – for example, if you reach the end of a stage as Mega Mario, you can knock down the flagpole. Mario then looks back at it sheepishly. Even better, you’re rewarded with extra lives for smashing objects.





**“My first home computer encounter with *Mario* was in *Donkey Kong* on the Dragon 32, which was the first game I saw on that machine in two-colour 320x200 mode, which was hi-definition of the day. Apart from the lack of colour it behaved as the arcade original, which probably persuaded me that the Dragon 32 could do the job and led us to choose it as our second platform to code on after the ZX Spectrum. My Dragon 32 conversions of Steve Turner’s first three games were all done in that graphics mode.**

**So you could say that Mario himself put me on the course to programming, without either of us knowing it.” ANDREW BRAYBROOK, GRAFTGOLD**





# OOPS UPSIDE YOUR HEAD

**AS SEEN IN:** Super Mario Galaxy

24

Having accidentally mastered the 3D platformer on its first attempt, Nintendo left itself a mountain to climb with each and every follow-up to *Super Mario 64*. Initial fears that *Galaxy* might fall into that oh-so-common Wii trap of abusing gimmicky controls and suffering as a result were allayed upon finally taking the game for a spin, where we discovered a totally different kind of gimmick – one that actually worked. Jumping mechanics are so integral to the *Mario* experience that relearning how these functioned in full 3D space when each planetoid had its own gravitational pull made for a stellar experience that could keep even platforming veterans on their toes.



**"Wind the clock back to 2010 and I'll be totally engrossed in *Super Mario Galaxy*, but this time I'm watching in amazement as my young son somehow masters using the Wiimote and Nunchuk and solving the puzzles in double quick time, yet he's to young to be able to read the screen menus and messages, so I say them out loud for him. Real father and son bonding stuff! He played it for months and months, and still does occasionally."**

**ARCHER MACLEAN, AWESOME STUDIOS**

# MULTIPLAYER MADNESS

**AS SEEN IN:** New Super Mario Bros. Wii

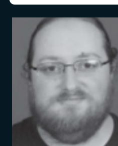
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Although previous *Mario* games had dabbled with multiplayer shenanigans, it wasn't until 2009 that Nintendo really perfected the formulae, allowing four friends to work together to complete the cleverly designed levels that Nintendo had crafted. Despite the cooperative-based gameplay there were still time for arguments as characters were unable to share each other's spaces, meaning it was all too possible to accidentally knock a friend off a ledge to their doom. Did we say accidentally? Sorry, we meant purposely.

The inclusion of additional players does highlight the fact that later *Mario* games seem to be rarely designed around them, but anyone who has chased another player around the screen so that they can knock them into a whole in the bottom of the screen is highly unlikely to care.





**"Early on in *Super Mario Galaxy*'s Good Egg Galaxy, there's a capsule-shaped planet with a glass exterior. The genius of the game's design became clear when I smashed my way inside to find a 2D challenge on a rotating stage, complete with gravity shifts. Up until that point, I'd thought it was just another good 3D *Mario* game – afterwards, I realised it was simply revolutionary."**

**NICK THORPE, SENIOR STAFF WRITER, RETRO GAMER**








“They’re all great! I love them all. But actually, the very first game is the most important to me. I played it at a time when I was still unemployed, before starting out somewhere. Playing this, I realised for the first time, ‘Oh, there is a game industry. This is something I could realise being creative, and actually conceive works of art.’ *Super Mario Bros.* would be my favourite because it actually pushed me into this industry. Otherwise, possibly, without this I wouldn’t even have ended up there.” **KEIJI INAFUNE, CAPCOM**



# WHO NEEDS BOWSER?

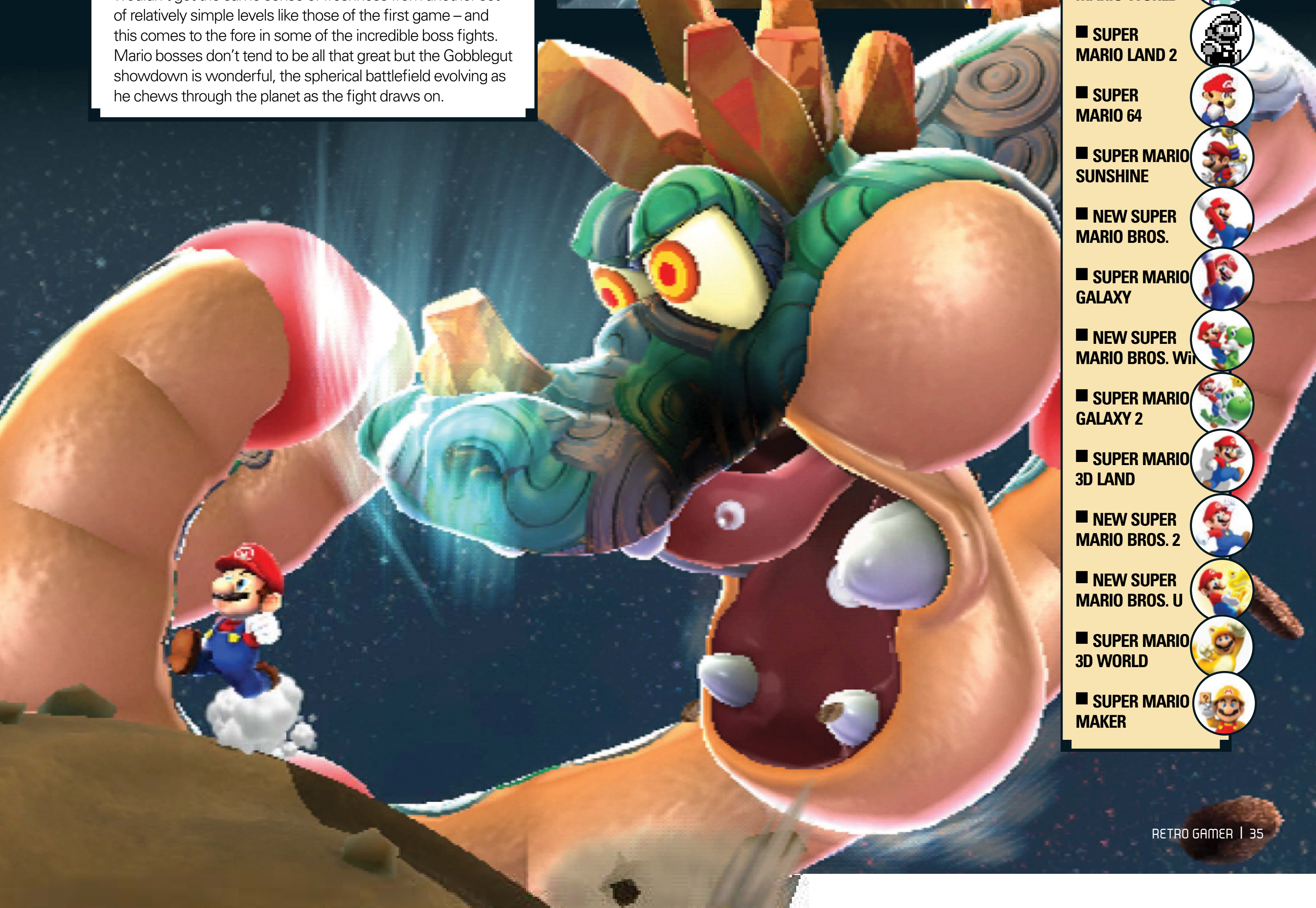
**AS SEEN IN:** Super Mario Galaxy 2

26

While it seemingly made use of a lot of the same assets as the original and didn’t mess with the near-perfect formula too much, *Galaxy 2* still found ways to innovate and impress, to the point where some would cite it as the better of the two games. It clearly has spectacle on its side – returning players wouldn’t get the same sense of freshness from another set of relatively simple levels like those of the first game – and this comes to the fore in some of the incredible boss fights. Mario bosses don’t tend to be all that great but the Gobblegut showdown is wonderful, the spherical battlefield evolving as he chews through the planet as the fight draws on.

## MARIO THROUGH THE AGES

- SUPER MARIO BROS.
- SUPER MARIO BROS. 2
- SUPER MARIO BROS. 3
- SUPER MARIO LAND
- SUPER MARIO WORLD
- SUPER MARIO LAND 2
- SUPER MARIO 64
- SUPER MARIO SUNSHINE
- NEW SUPER MARIO BROS.
- SUPER MARIO GALAXY
- NEW SUPER MARIO BROS. Wi
- SUPER MARIO GALAXY 2
- SUPER MARIO 3D LAND
- NEW SUPER MARIO BROS. 2
- NEW SUPER MARIO BROS. U
- SUPER MARIO 3D WORLD
- SUPER MARIO MAKER



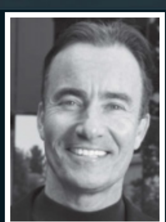



## AN ALL-NEW PERSPECTIVE

**AS SEEN IN:** Super Mario 3D Land

27

Having miraculously mastered the art of 3D level design on its first attempt, Nintendo never had us worried about that aspect of *3D Land*. But the 3DS' primary gimmick did, mainly because we remember the sea of early DS releases that were ruined by attempts to utilize novelty hardware features. To this day, though, *3D Land* remains the only game that uses the handheld's illusion of depth on a gameplay level, with puzzle rooms playing cunning tricks with 3D space. Even elsewhere, though, 3D offered some great moments, really giving a sense of height and depth to moments like this death-defying drop.



**"My favorite moment, honestly, is the fun we all had in the arcades playing *Donkey Kong*, and how we all helped the heroic little plumber outsmart the formerly-eponymous monkey and steal the brand. My second favorite moment is every time I hear a sound effect that I know had its origin with *Mario*. *Mario* forever!"**

**TRIP HAWKINS, ELECTRONIC ARTS**

## THE CRAZY COIN BOOST

**AS SEEN IN:** New Super Mario Bros. U

28

*Mario* games have long been the careful, considered other side of the coin to Sonic's high-speed hijinks, but a new mode would look to address this long-standing difference in opinion between the two rivals. Boost Rush was the result of Mario realizing that maybe he *did* have to go fast after all, auto-scrolling stages speeding up the more you lined your pockets with gold. It felt a little like a mobile title – auto-runners are everywhere these days – but with the polish and production values you'd expect from Nintendo, proving that the developer wasn't nearly as out of touch with modern gaming as its critics might claim.



## SO MANY COINS… SO LITTLE TIME…

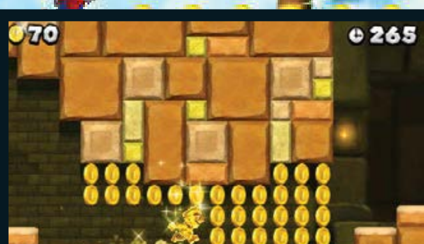
**AS SEEN IN:** New Super Mario Bros. 2

**29**

The fact that you can make it through most classic *Mario* stages without collecting more than a few coins would suggest to us that the mascot wasn't in it for the money, but *New Super Mario Bros. 2* flipped that notion on its head, and as a result made us look at Mario's currency in a whole new light. Here, the very point of the game is to rack up an insane balance and in a single level, you could easily bag as many coins as you likely would in an entire playthrough of one of the older games. There's something completely mesmerising about seeing levels awash with those dinky yellow coins and it became even more enticing when you were playing with a second player.

Suddenly a brand new game mechanic introduced a highly competitive element to the series that was not only incredibly fun, but also helped hide the fact that Nintendo's 3DS-based sequel wasn't quite as impressive as the excellent handheld platformer that had proceeded it. The novelty of collecting all those coins was somewhat short-lived, it must by said, but the initial excitement of seeing money *everywhere* was still a welcome change of pace for the series and one of the highlights of Nintendo's portable sequel.







## THE HELPFUL GHOSTS

**AS SEEN IN:** Super Mario 3D World

**30**

As games grow increasingly complex, their secrets naturally get harder and harder to find. But in its hugely entertaining ghost replay feature, this Wii U stunner found as strong an answer to this issue as Wonder Guide was for that of rising difficulty. As you explore, you'll see the routes taken by other players happening around you. Some may lead you to hidden items or areas, others to shortcuts that help shave precious seconds off your best level times and, even more basic, it allowed for oddly addictive asynchronous multiplayer as you race against others who may not even be online.



**"I've always enjoyed the *Mario* games, but it's the latest one which has become my favourite. My family absolutely loves cats, and *Super Mario 3D World*'s Cat Suit ensured that both my children and wife would participate in multiplayer games. Initially the Cat Suit comes across as a bit of a gimmick, but you soon realise just how versatile it is. It begs you to explore the world as it allows you to cling to and climb walls that you otherwise couldn't access, opening up the seemingly linear levels and proving just how clever Nintendo's design still is. It might be a little chaotic playing Mario games multiplayer, but there's no denying that they're also a lot of fun."**

**DARRAN JONES, EDITOR, RETRO GAMER**



## WHAT NEXT?

As *Super Mario Maker* has only just been released it wouldn't be fair to add a moment for it here, although the online side of it is suggesting that players are already making the most of Nintendo's new creation tool. Our advice is to check out our review on page 98 and start creating your own moments.








## VORTEX 101

■ Argonaut's experience with 3D graphics and the Super FX chip combined with Michael Wong-Powell's plans for a transforming robot game. A small team created levels that were free-roaming rather than the fixed paths of *Starfox*.








# After the success of Starwing, Argonaut Software created Vortex with the Super FX chip. Andrew Fisher talks to the development team and solves a retro-gaming mystery

**Argonaut's *Vortex* featured a shape-changing robot – the Battle Morphing System, with four** forms – but contrary to the online myths it was never a *Transformers* game. *Super Play* magazine printed the rumour Argonaut was developing a game based on the toys, but programmer Michael Wong-Powell gives us the facts. "There was actually one in development, but it was cancelled. When I first talked to Jez San about the chip they were developing it was one of the games on the cards. I originally thought of moulding my ideas into the *Transformers* game, but Jez wanted to get a few games out on Super FX, so kept my game separate."

Designer Nic Cusworth confirms this: "We were making a *Transformers* game for Hasbro alongside *Vortex*. I think a lot people assume *Vortex* was the *Transformers* game but they were completely different projects.."

So with that myth busted, let's go back. Michael had created the 3D racing game *Powerdrome* with school friend Glyn Williams and started work on a new idea. "It was something I'd wanted to do for a while; a transforming robot game," he recalls. "It was only paper designs before I got involved with Argonaut – concept sketches, ideas and tests with a working title of *Citadel*." It involved a very small team. "Just five in the team. Programming: me, 3D modelling: Stephen Robertson, designer: Nic Cusworth, art: Alistair McNally and music by Justin Scharvona – but loads of support from the Argonaut tech team and the guys embedded in Nintendo working on *Starfox*." Was *Citadel* ever planned for another format? "[It was] always for the SNES with Super FX, that was the whole deal. It shared code for the graphics with *Starfox* unsurprisingly."

When asked about working with Super FX, Michael says, "Argonaut had its own special dev kits, with a debug version of the Super FX. It had a very good hardware division headed by Rick Clucas, which became a multi-million pound company in its own right (ARC) doing designs for silicon chips. Super FX didn't end up as powerful as it wanted, but it was still pretty amazing. It was great fun working on the cutting-edge technology. At the time graphics were done on the main processor, and having a custom 3D chip was a first – now we call them GPUs. Real kudos to Rick and his team, designing custom silicon from a basement in Colindale." We bet Nic was excited. "Really excited! Everything used to make the game was bespoke. There weren't a lot of tools for making 3D games back then and I seem to remember all the objects were created in code, not in a 3D package."

Stephen Robertson created many of those 3D objects, after briefly working on QA for *Starfox*. "I showed Michael some 3D objects I'd designed as an experiment, Steve remembers. "He liked them enough to ask to use them in-game, so he optimised them and they became some of the game's enemies.




» [SNES] Lieutenant Dante's mothership picks up the Morphing Battle System.

He asked me to do some more objects and I ended up designing enemies, plus the elevator and tunnel systems.

"There was an in-house editor which was quite fiddly. It did have some animation features, but only by moving each vertex individually. It had a page-flipping mode where you could preview animations. The editor was used to do all the Super FX games, but Michael had his own 3D object editor he'd written which was probably more powerful, but much harder to use. He converted my 3D objects into his 3D object format and finished editing them in his program before importing them into the game. The objects were fairly limited in how ▶

> **"I think a lot of people assume Vortex was the Transformers game but they were complete different projects"**
> Nic Cusworth

# SPECIFICATIONS

**The Morphing Battle System operates in four different modes**



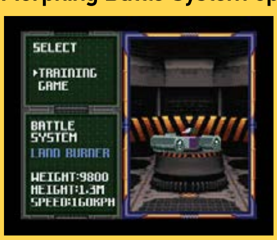

### WALKER

- Three forward speeds, one reverse.
- Holds the ability to pick up items.
- Boost jump and four weapon pods.




### SONIC JET

- Uses fuel faster than other modes.
- Forward firing lasers.
- Reaches high speeds (260KPH).




### LAND BURNER

- High speed all-terrain capability.
- Three forward speeds, one reverse.
- Forward firing lasers.




### HARD SHELL

- Unable to move.
- Invulnerable to attack.
- Electrobomb recharges.




## IN THE KNOW

- **» PUBLISHER:** Sony Electronic Publishing
- **» DEVELOPER:** Argonaut Software
- **» RELEASED:** 1994
- **» PLATFORM:** SNES
- **» GENRE:** Action



## DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

**STARGLIDER**
**SYSTEM:** Various
**YEAR:** 1987

**POWERDROME**
**SYSTEM:** Amiga, Atari ST, PC DOS
**YEAR:** 1989

**STARFOX 2** (PICTURED)
**SYSTEM:** SNES
**YEAR:** 1995 (Cancelled)

# SPECIAL FX

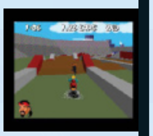
### The games fuelled by Nintendo's super chip

**DIRT RACER**



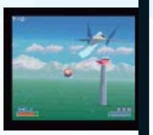
■ Created by Elite Systems, players chose one of three vehicles to compete in one-on-one races over five courses. The league and tournament options gave multiple races, and a yellow face offered feedback on the driver's performance.

**DIRT TRAX FX**



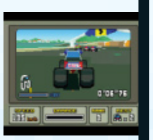
■ This motorbike racing simulation allowed for two-player simultaneous play but was plagued by frame-rate issues. A choice of riders and bike capacity gave four difficulty levels over 22 different courses, including the unique 'Tag' mode.

**STARWING**
**(Starfox outside of Europe)**



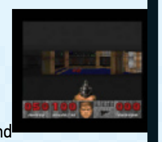
■ The first and perhaps most famous Super FX game, covered in depth in issue 28. The graphical style and talking heads of the team-mates influenced *Vortex*, while Slippy's "Do a barrel roll!" became an Internet meme.

**STUNT RACE FX**
**(Wild Trax in Japan)**



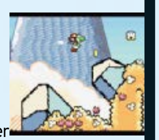
■ Famous for its varied tracks, this was developed by Nintendo EAD with support from Argonaut Software. Plans for an N64 sequel were dropped, but the vehicles made a cameo in *Smash Bros. Brawl*.

**DOOM**



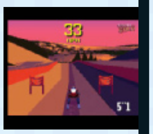
■ Powered by Super FX 2, this port of the classic FPS lacked some levels and texture mapping on floors and ceilings, but did offer support for the SNES Mouse and had a two-player deathmatch mode when using the XBAND modem.

**SUPER MARIO WORLD 2: YOSHI'S ISLAND**



■ Produced by Shigeru Miyamoto and developed over a period of four years, Yoshi's cute adventure used the Super FX 2 chip for rotational effects and scaling graphics.

**WINTER GOLD**



■ Developed by Funcom in Norway, up to eight players chose a country and took turns to compete in a series of winter sports. This included ski jumping, bobsleigh, downhill, slalom, hot dog aerials and snowboarding.



» [SNES] The underground bunkers of level 2 are filled with man traps that sap your energy, so jump over them.

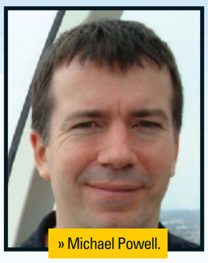



» [SNES] The in-game map, drawn by Nic Cusworth.




» [SNES] Finding the defence droid added extra firepower.

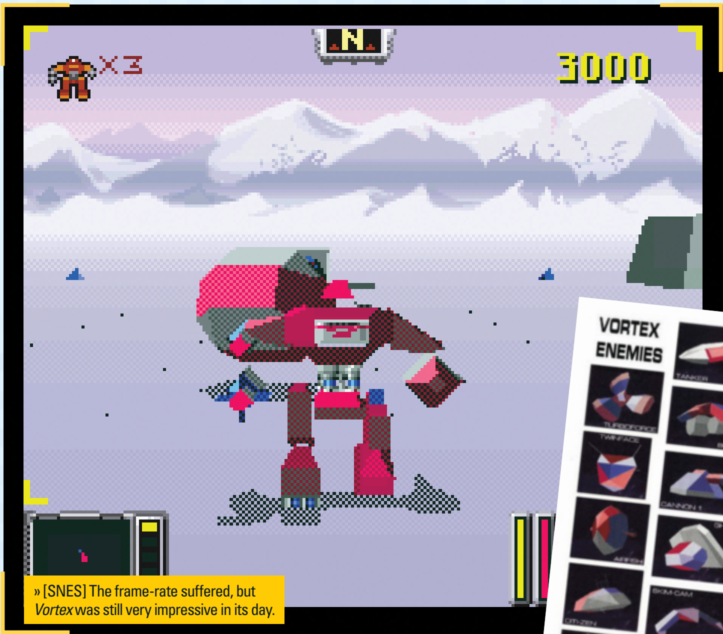
▶ many polygons or vertices you could use – I think you could only render at most a couple of hundred polygons on screen at a reasonable frame-rate, and the robot used half of those! When designing the objects you could use polygons with more than three vertices but you had to be careful to make sure all the verts lined up on the plane otherwise you'd get a dodgy polygon which wouldn't render."



» Michael Powell.

**There were seven different levels in *Vortex*, each with a different objective** and boss battle. Creating the maps was Nic's job. "Instead of having a level editor, every map was built in DPaint (a very simple but industry standard pixel editor). I had a custom palette where each colour represented an object or enemy in the game. I'd draw these maps as a 2D bitmap and load them into the game to see what I'd managed to create. It was a very iterative process, even though it was an incredibly simple system. The bitmaps ended up being used as the map screens for the game."

Stephen recalls some problems. "I wasn't involved with the actual level design much, but in QA it became apparent that we were pioneering this type of game and bugs appeared which weren't a problem on linear 3D games like *Starfox*. For example, the robot's body could interpenetrate other 3D objects slightly or clip through the camera, and these issues were flagged up as major bugs; but these were impossible to prevent with the power of the hardware we had. I don't think people understood the limitations of 3D technology for free-roaming games at that time, and many of the issues we encountered were still present in much later 3D games." There was another important restriction. "It had to fit into a four-megabit (512k) cartridge, mainly due to production costs. Super FX based carts were expensive, and eight megabits of ROM would have made it too costly to produce. So we had to fit the game in 512K – art, music, code, data – everything," says Stephen.



» [SNES] The frame-rate suffered, but *Vortex* was still very impressive in its day.

The game took 12 months to develop and was released through Electro Brains, a small American publisher; a free promotional comic was given away in the US. Michael says, "We did want a much bigger publisher, but to be honest, the game was very low budget; it was all about exploiting the Super FX chip and getting something to market quickly. The problem for third-party publishers was Nintendo made them pay up-front for cartridges, and this was expensive for the Super FX carts. This made for a small initial order and difficult to make a game a hit for the small publisher. I would have liked a bigger team and a bigger budget! We had loads of ideas that we didn't have time to implement." Would Nic have changed anything? "It was my first project, with 20-plus years of experience there are so many things I'd change. The controls are tricky to get your head around; I find it difficult to play. During development we felt it played well. Stepping though the 'gears' doesn't seem to make a lot of sense in hindsight. I guess it gave you a little more control over your speed in a world before analogue sticks. The biggest change I would make is the first level. It was a total afterthought by the publisher. The logic behind it was that you went through a vortex to fight in an alien world, but we started you in the alien world. Unfortunately the existing Vortex level was the worst part of the game. We were bending the mechanics to make something like a *Starfox*-style shooter but it didn't play well at all. So the decision to put one of those levels as the first level of the game was terrible. We should have scrapped the Vortex level later in the game. After









## "I would have liked a bigger team and a bigger budget. We had loads of ideas that we didn't have time to implement"

Michael Powell


» Stephen Robertson.

building the first level, I never played it again. I used the cheat code to skip it. A code I still remember: CTGXF."

The team fondly remember Justin Scharvona's soundtrack, which contains an hour of music. Stephen says, "I was a big fan. It was possibly one of the first games to do 3D positional audio, where the location of an object in 3D space determines where you can hear it in the surround setup." Justin had started composing on the Amiga in 1988 and later joined Argonaut. "I created the world's first game to feature Dolby Surround audio using the SNES (*King Arthur's World*). This was something I worked out with my audio programmer, and we approached Dolby to tell it we could do this. It was very interested at this unknown feature for computer games that we had discovered, and this became a standard since then." So how were the tunes developed? "I created all the music using a Roland D750 sampler and Cubase software running on PC," says Justin. "The music was written using normal methods and converted onto the SNES. We created a program which took the MIDI file and converted it into a text file of notes and durations that the SNES could understand. Everything was written using a keyboard and could be heard without using the hardware. The sounds I used to create the music on the sampler were the same ones that the SNES would play back."

Michael and Stephen worked together again, on *Independence War*. Michael says, "Each game I worked on was a highlight, but probably the most satisfying was *I-War*, where we did it all with a small team of six; it did well and we ended up with a hardcore following." Stephen also has fond memories: "I had a lot of fun working on *Vortex*, and it introduced me to Michael, which led to him offering me a job at Particle Systems. That job was one of the most enjoyable times of my gaming career."

With the cancellation of *FX Fighter* and *Starfox 2*, just seven other Super FX games were released . *Vortex* may not be as widely or fondly remembered as *Starwing*, but it certainly deserves more attention as a pioneer of 3D gaming. *

# CHIP'S CHALLENGE

### The enhancement chips of the SNES

**CX4**
Games used in: 2
■ This maths coprocessor was used for rotation and wireframe effects, most famously in Capcom's *Mega Man X* series.

**GB-Z80**
Games used in: Super Game Boy
■ The Super Game Boy add-on used this chip to emulate the circuitry and functions of the original Game Boy.

**OBC-1**
Games used in: 1
■ The Super Scope title *Metal Combat: Falcon's Revenge* used this chip for sprite scaling.

**S-DD1**
Games used in: 2
■ This special chip was used for decompressing the large amounts of sprite data necessary in *Star Ocean* and *Street Fighter Alpha 2*.

**SA1**
Games used in: 26
■ Effectively a second processor, the Super Accelerator 1 ran faster, had extra memory handling tricks and was shown off to good effect in Square's *Super Mario RPG: Legend Of The Seven Stars*.

**SUPER FX**
Games used in: 8
■ Originally known as MARIO (Mathematical, Argonaut, Rotation & I/O), hackers have overclocked the chip to make the games run faster.

**DSP SERIES**
Games used in: 20
■ The digital signal processor (DSP) chip went through several revisions; in the conversion of *Dungeon Master* it provided transparency effects.

**MX15001TFC**
Games used in: Nintendo Power downloads
■ *Nintendo Power* kiosks allowed players to download games for a fee to their cartridge, containing a flash ROM to hold the data.

**S-RTC**
Games used in: 1
■ This real-time clock was only used in RPG *Daikaiju Monogatari II*.

**SPC7110**
Games used in: 3
■ Developed by Epson and used in some of Hudson's games, this chip was primarily for data compression.

**ST SERIES**
Games used in: 3
■ The SETA Corporation developed this coprocessor for handling artificial intelligence (AI); its uses included the opposing racers in *Exhaust Heat* (aka *F1 ROC II: Race of Champions*).





# Intellivoice

» **PLATFORM:** INTELLIVISION » **RELEASED:** 1982 » **COST:** £20 (BOXED) / £10 (UNBOXED)

**When Mattel Electronics announced the Intellivoice, anticipation was high. After all, speech in games was an enormous novelty – even arcade games had only been able to do voices for a couple of years. Initial reviews were positive too, thanks to the strength of early games and the unique features that speech gave them. However, the unit failed at retail and was discontinued after just a year on shelves, and plans to recoup the investment by integrating the unit into an Intellivision III console were never realised.**

**Why? Well, the Intellivoice module was an expensive item – $100 on launch, with no pack-in game to demonstrate the device's capabilities. Worse yet, the Intellivoice itself only contained generic phrases, so anything game-specific had to be included on the cartridge itself. This meant bigger ROM chips were required, meaning that the games that did support the add-on were also expensive. Even the popular *Tron* licence couldn't push the unit's fourth game to 100,000 sales, so existing projects such as *Magic Carousel* were shelved. In the end, just five games made it to shelves – *B-17 Bomber, Bomb Squad, Space Spartans, Tron: Solar Sailer* and the ECS-enhanced *World Series Major League Baseball.***






## ESSENTIAL GAME

### B-17 Bomber

This innovative game casts you as a bomber pilot during World War II, flying out from a base in England to strike targets across continental Europe. Of course, you'll have to fend off attacks from enemy aircraft in order to carry out your mission, and this is where the voice feature comes into its own – you'll receive spoken warnings about incoming fire, approaching targets and the like. With multiple views from the plane and a variety of gauges to check, this is an impressive air combat game for its era and platform and arguably the only essential Intellivoice game.

## Intellivoice Fact

■ An international version of the Intellivoice with support for French, German and Italian speech was planned. *Space Spartans* was even translated in preparation for its launch, but the unit never made it beyond the prototype stage.

**STATS**

**VOICE CHIP:** XGENERAL INSTRUMENT SP0256

**FREQUENCY RANGE:** 150HZ – 5KHZ

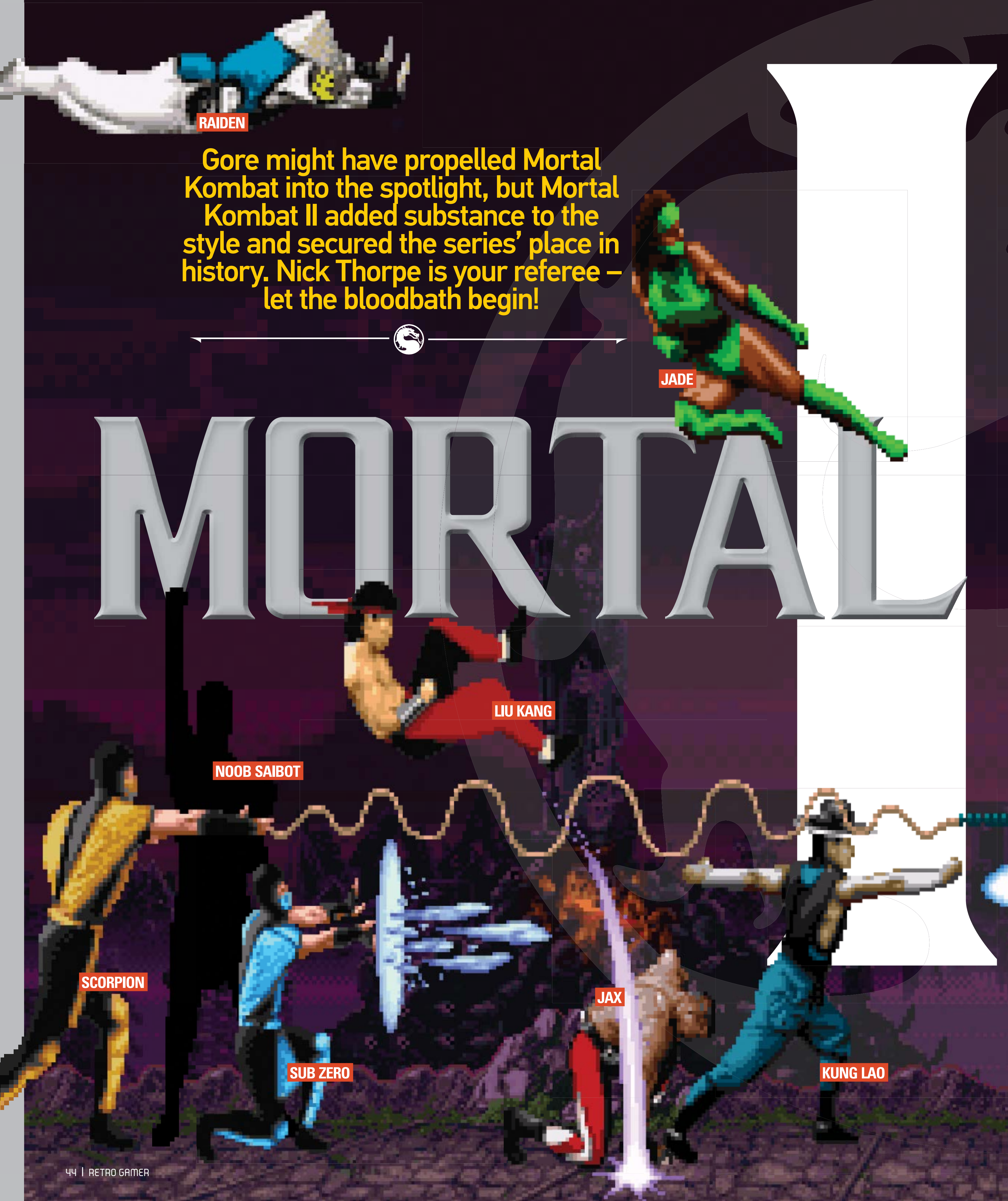
**ROM:** 2KB

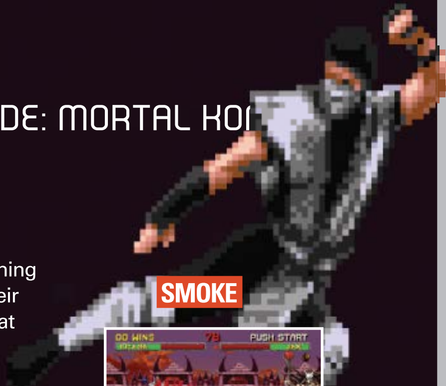
**ON-BOARD WORDS:** 36



# MORTAL I

**Gore might have propelled Mortal Kombat into the spotlight, but Mortal Kombat II added substance to the style and secured the series' place in history. Nick Thorpe is your referee – let the bloodbath begin!**






# I

**It's been said that there's no such thing as bad publicity, and the original *Mortal Kombat* is all the evidence you need to prove that. The gory fighter was a big deal in** arcades thanks to its digitised fighters and brutal Fatality finishing moves, and it launched on home consoles right at the peak of the videogame violence hysteria. This made it a focal point of the US Senate hearings on the subject, increasing the game's notoriety and its desirability, propelling it to multi-million sales.

You'd think that a sequel was surely inevitable after that kind of success, and in the middle of a fighting game boom. However, the team at Midway hadn't entertained the prospect of a sequel and was actually dreaming up a *Star Wars* game when their general manager told them that a new *Mortal Kombat* was needed. The team went for the simplest approach to a sequel – a bigger and better take on the original, with more of the things players loved and all of the ideas that didn't make the first game.

*Mortal Kombat II*'s story sees Earth's greatest warriors lured to Outworld, following Liu Kang's successful defence of Earth from invasion in the previous tournament. The man behind the plot is Outworld emperor Shao Khan, who was furious at the failure of his underling Shang Tsung to conquer Earth, ▶

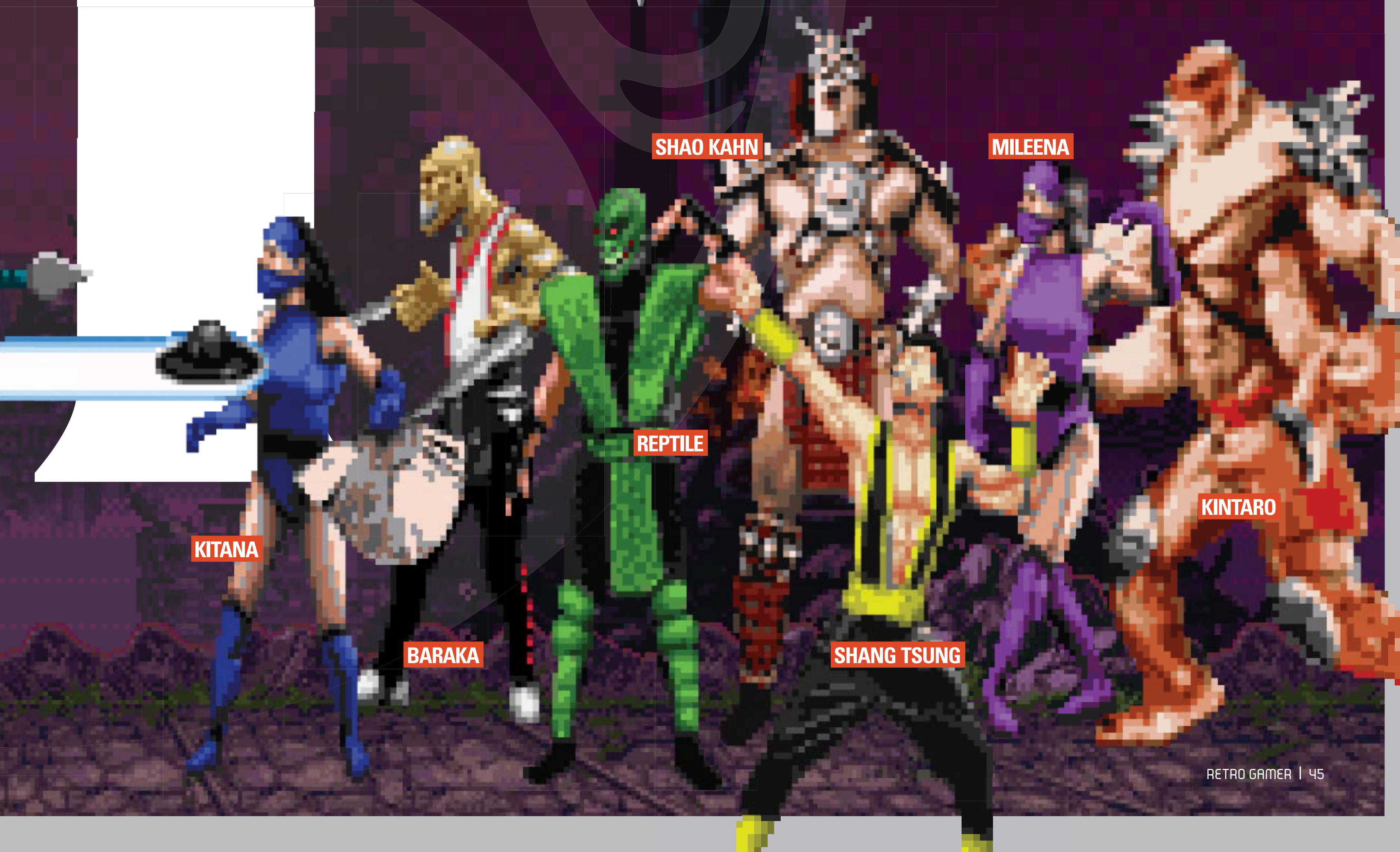



» [Arcade] *MK II* increased the gore significantly – buckets of blood were spilled after practically every move.




» [Arcade] Does any fighter pass the acid test in the Dead Pool? No, they do not.

# KOMBAT



## EXCELLENT EXECUTIONS

With over twice as many fatalities as the first game, Mortal Kombat II features some spectacular deaths…

GORE RATING



### DRAGON TRANSFORMATION
LIU KANG

■ After having the worst fatality in the original, Liu Kang steps up his game by literally transforming into a mythical being and eating his opponent.



### TORSO TEAR
JOHNNY CAGE

■ Is Johnny Cage hugging his opponent? Nope, far from it – he's actually forcefully grabbing them by the torso and making a clean break. Good job, Johnny!



### DEEP FREEZE
SUB ZERO

■ Have you ever seen someone smash something that has been frozen in liquid nitrogen? This Fatality is kind of like that, but with a frosty ninja punching someone.



### KISS OF DEATH
KITANA

■ One fatal kiss goodbye from Shao Khan's assassin will make you swell with pride, immediately before you literally swell up and explode in true gory fashion.



### HAT SPLIT
KUNG LAO

■ Kung Lao takes the term 'splitting headache' to a new level. One swift slice bisects the opponent clean down the middle, in one of the game's most gruesome deaths.



### DECAP-A-SNACK
REPTILE

■ Our reptilian friend's big long tongue is strong, like a chameleon. So strong, in fact, that it can pull a human head clean off for him to eat in one bite. Yummy!




» [Arcade] Shang Tsung was demoted from final boss to regular character, but retained his shape-shifting powers.

▶ and he's the new man to beat. Of course, to get to him you need to make it through his four-armed guard Kintaro. Shang Tsung, having been given a stay of execution, is relegated from final boss status to a member of the main cast, and the hidden character Reptile joins him on the character select screen. Liu Kang, Scorpion, Sub Zero, Johnny Cage and Raiden are all back to do battle too, but Sonya Blade and Kano from the first game have been captured and relegated to background dressing. However, newcomers take their place – female ninjas Mileena and Kitana, military man Jax, the hat-throwing Kung Lao and bladed freak Baraka.

*Mortal Kombat II* features the same one-on-one fighting gameplay as its predecessor, using the same five button set-up, with high and low punches and kicks plus a dedicated block button. As in the first game, characters have the same basic speed and strength, and are largely differentiated by the special moves that they possess. All of the old hands were given new tricks – Liu Kang gained a bicycle kick and the ability to perform low fireballs, while Sub Zero could freeze the ground to make his opponent lose their footing. The newcomers brought some, unique abilities to the brawls too, like Reptile's invisibility and Baraka's trapping attack.

**However, the first game's most important moves were the Fatalities, performed after the fight on a defeated** opponent. These gory moves had been the most controversial part of the original game, and the sequel doubled down on them – every character now had two, and they were typically even more gruesome than before. The original game also featured a famous universal fatality in The Pit, where players could send opponents tumbling into a pit of spikes – but the new game had three. As well as The Pit II, players could impale their opponents on the ceiling spikes of the Kombat Tomb and melt them in the acid of the Dead Pool. What's more, Friendship and Babality moves allowed you to add humour to the bout, as well as ramming home the point that you handicapped yourself by only using kicks.

Another thing that players loved about the first game was the hidden character Reptile, so Midway really ramped up the secrets for the sequel. Three different hidden fighters were introduced, each hinted at throughout gameplay. Smoke, a grey ninja, fought with Scorpion's moves and moved incredibly quickly. Noob Saibot, a pitch black ninja named after creators Ed Boon and John Tobias, mixed moves from the other ninjas. Jade, a green-clad female fighter, used Kitana's moves and




» [Arcade] New characters integrated seamlessly into the cast, thanks to their strong designs.



## SOUL STEALER
SHANG TSUNG

■ How does the ancient wizard stay in high spirits and retain his youthful viasage? Well, easy: by stealing the very life force of his victims, of course!



## DISARMED
JAX

■ Jax dismembers his opponent with one swift pull, rendering them completely 'armless. (Nick, your P45 is with HR – Darran.)



## FAST FOOD
MILEENA

■ Mileena's never been much of a picky eater – she can pretty much devour a human whole in one go, before spitting out the skeletal remains. Nasty.



## A SHOCKING CONCLUSION
RAIDEN

■ Raiden delivers what appears to be quite an amusing electric tickle, leading to the untimely explosion of his opponent. Oops.



## SKEWERED
BARAKA

■ With both of his ridiculously lengthy blades protruding from his arms, Baraka hoists his opponent in the air and doesn't let up until they slide right down.



## TOASTY!
SCORPION

■ We like the fact that Scorpion's new Fatality makes great use of his iconic spear weapon, but we've got to stick with the classic one here – it's flawless!

» [Arcade] Secret fighters appeared in Goro's Lair, bolstering the myth that they'd been intended for the first game.




» [Arcade] If you could defeat your opponent without punches, you could humiliate them with a Friendship.




was fully immune to projectiles. That wasn't all – to keep players guessing, some mischievous misdirection was employed. The machine's operator settings falsely audited for 'Kano Transformations' in an attempt to trick players into believing that Shang Tsung could perform them.

All of these additions contributed to the popularity of *Mortal Kombat II*, but what really secured the game's long-term popularity was an improved fighting system – fatalities are all well and good, but the fighting that leads to them has to be satisfying too. 'Juggling' enemies by hitting them in mid-air was still possible as in the first game, and it became easier to set up such instances but harder to keep the opponent aloft. The uppercut attack was made a bit more useful with an extended hit box. The new moves for existing characters greatly diversified tactical options, too – before, it was possible to avoid Liu Kang's fireballs simply by ducking, but in *Mortal Kombat II* he could aim low at a crouching opponent or even fire mid-jump. Where *Mortal Kombat* had got by on its gore, *Mortal Kombat II* was considered to be in legitimate competition with *Street Fighter*.

**The other thing that helped the fighting to feel so much smoother than before was the more fluid** animation found in the sequel, which accompanied a set of varied backgrounds – a welcome side effect of the new setting. Sound was also improved considerably between games, with more memorable music and a higher quality sound chip.

However, the best bit of all was that home players got to share in the fun. Every major format got a conversion of *Mortal Kombat II*, and while the 8-bit console versions were very cut down, just about every conversion felt like *Mortal Kombat II* and was amongst the best fighting games on its platform. In fact, the popularity of the game was such that when Acclaim didn't get the home conversion rights for *Mortal Kombat 3*, the publisher felt confident enough to put out a version of the second game on the PlayStation and Saturn to compete with it.

It's fair to say that *Mortal Kombat II* was long considered the high point of the series, and for many it still is. Not only did the game inspire the very good spin-off beat-'em-up *Mortal Kombat: Shaolin Monks*, it served as the biggest influence on the series' 2011 reboot. While the fighting mechanics might have improved over the years, *Mortal Kombat II* is irreplaceable as the point at which the series developed an identity beyond, "That gory brawler." *Mortal Kombat II* features the series' trademark sense of humour, iconic characters and the capability to host memorable fights. That's why the developers still look back to it as a reference, and that's why we still play it today. *



» [Arcade] All-new stage fatalities gave players more options to murder their foes.

> "It's fair to say that Mortal Kombat II was long considered the high point of the series"



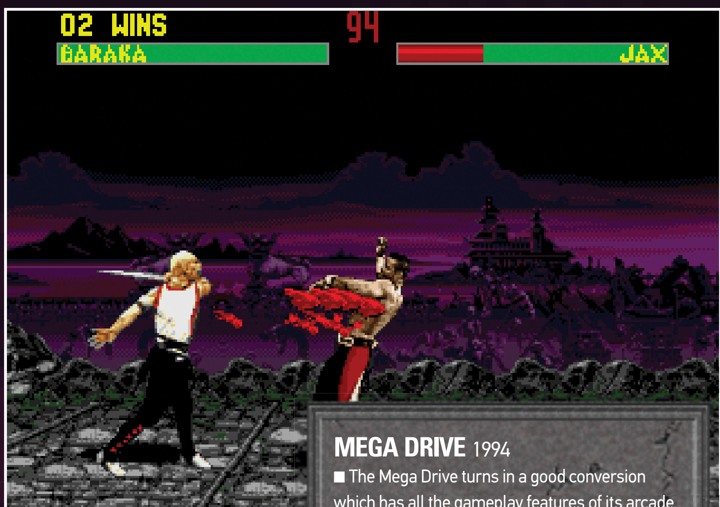

» [Arcade] What could be more humiliating than being transformed into a nappy-clad infant?




» [Arcade] The classic Pit fatality returned, this time with a top-down view of the unfortunate fighter's plummet.

# KONVERSION KAPERS

With Kombat fever running wild, owners of all platforms wanted a version to call their own. All of them were good, but which ones come out on top?



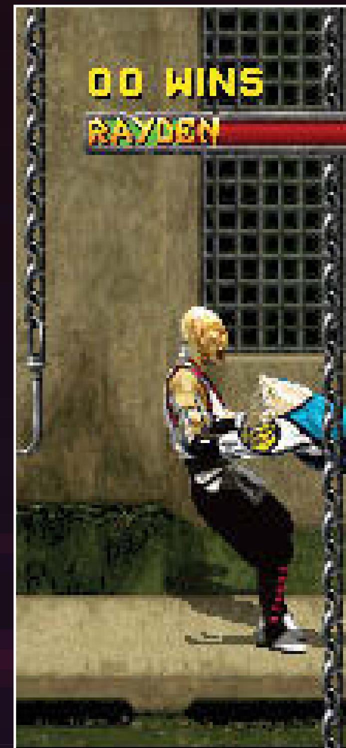

## MEGA DRIVE 1994

■ The Mega Drive turns in a good conversion which has all the gameplay features of its arcade parent. Support for the six-button pad ensures that the game plays well. There's also support for the Activator, if you're insane. The presentation isn't perfect, but it's worth picking up.

## SNES 1994

■ This conversion is almost good enough to banish the memory of the sanitised SNES version of the first game – all the gore is present and correct, the game has all of the features of the arcade original and, for our money, it just edges the Mega Drive version on graphics and sound.













## MASTER SYSTEM 1994

■ The Master System version is basically a straight conversion of the Game Gear version, but suffers for the lack of a third button with which to block. On the plus side, you do gain a bit of screen space. It's better than most Master System fighters, though there's little competition.

## GAME BOY 1994

■ There was a lot going on for the poor old Game Boy to handle, so it's missing a third of the playable characters and Kintaro, as well as all but two of the game's backgrounds. It's still a pretty decent two-button version of the game, but it won't be anyone's first choice..

## GAME GEAR 1994

■ The Game Gear version gains colour and Kintaro over the Game Boy version, but loses a little of the speed and smoothness of the Nintendo game. Other than that, it's cut down in the same ways. It's hard to choose one over the other – both are reasonable.




## 32X 1994

■ If you've turbo-charged your Mega Drive, you'll find that the game is essentially the same, but with visuals that show off more colour. It also contains the arcade presentation screens, but the sound is unchanged. It's a toss up between this and the SNES version.




## SATURN 1996

■ The Saturn version is very similar to its PlayStation counterpart, but bests it with superior audio and less frequent loading. This one was also released worldwide so it's generally cheaper to acquire, but prices can fluctuate. However, it's still not quite as good as you'd hope given the power of the platform.




**PLAYSTATION** 1996

■ We're not sure what happened with this Japan-only version. While it's visually quite nice, there's frequent loading and the music, played through the PlayStation sound chip, sounds less authentic than the 16-bit versions. This is a lso a rarity, so we'd advise that you steer clear of it.

**PC** 1995

■ With the right sound card, the PC provides the most authentic experience of any conversion – the visuals are excellent, the gameplay is spot-on (down to the habits of the CPU opponents) and all the various speech effects are in. The excellent SNES and 32X versions don't even come close.






**AMIGA** 1995

■ The Amiga version looks great and is adapted well to one-button controls, even if it does feel a little inauthentic for it. Unfortunately, disk-swapping is required and it contains a few bugs. It compares well to Amiga fighters, but there are better versions out there.

**AND THE REST…**

■ Versions of *Mortal Kombat II* appeared on *Mortal Kombat: Shaolin Monks* (PS2, Xbox), *Midway Arcade Treasures 2* (PS2, Xbox, Gamecube), *Midway Arcade Treasures: Extended Play* (PSP), *Midway Arcade Treasures: Deluxe Edition* (PC) and *Mortal Kombat Arcade Kollection* (Xbox 360, PS3, PC). The *Kollection* is the best of these.

# Q&A: ROB O'FARRELL

**The former Probe producer shares his memories of bringing the arcade to home systems**



**Had you played *Mortal Kombat II* before the ports came to Probe?**
We picked up [the original] *MK*, and I was the assistant producer on that so it helped that we'd already done that. Even though the programmer was different between *Mortal Kombat* and *Mortal Kombat II*, they knew each other and talked to each other, so that helped us.

**How much access to the original arcade materials did you have?**
We had the whole source. We wouldn't have been able to do it otherwise! We knew how to port things over, we were great at that, but we needed to have the original source material. We'd also play the machine, we had the arcade machine up and running.

**How did you guys get so many platforms done? A few people seem to have worked on most versions.**
In truth because there were smaller teams – for *MK II* I think I only had one programmer at the time and one artist, so I didn't have that many people to manage. It was a lot easier, though it was probably as busy. The Game Gear version and the Master System version were done by Keith Burkhill – the Master System version, which we ported across from the Game Gear, took three days. I remember at the time talking to Keith and him saying, "How much am I going to charge?" I said, 'Look, just charge them a load of money.' He said, 'But it's only going to take me five days.' He did it in three.

Terry Ford was the artist I used to convert all the graphics. With Terry, what I used to do – because he was really good at porting the graphics down – he'd send me a batch through and I'd say, 'Nope, not good enough.' Even though they were really good, I just got into the habit of sending them back and he'd always send them back better. So we got into this cycle and we always managed to find that extra bit to make the art look really good.

**The one version Probe didn't handle was the SNES version. Why was that?**
Sculptured Software picked it up first. They were more of a Nintendo developer, whereas we covered everything but we also focused much more on the Mega Drive side of things. With Probe, we were good at doing a lot of platforms. I think if we'd done all the platforms, I'm not convinced we'd have done as good a job. It actually helped us knowing that we were up against the SNES version.

**What challenges did you face?**
The Amiga version seemed quite hard – doing the combinations and stuff like that was a tough one. It was just making sure you could do the moves, especially the fatalities, in the amount of time that you had. Some moves we designed originally, you just couldn't get to the combinations in time, so there was tweaking from that perspective. Our biggest challenge with *MK II* was the leap in the amount of characters – there were more characters, more moves, and Acclaim didn't want to go up to the bigger cartridge size as it was more costly. I remember trying to get a compression utility written, it was a bank holiday weekend and I'd borrowed all the PCs in the office, and I started running all these utilities to try and get everything in. It took me until Monday afternoon, the bank holiday, and it still didn't all fit. Then a guy called Nick Pelling came along – on the Tuesday, actually – and wrote this utility for me where he pressed the button and it ran everything in five or ten seconds. I couldn't believe my whole weekend had gone! But it saved *Mortal Kombat II*, we wouldn't have been able to fit it onto the cartridge without it.

**In the Mega Drive version, there was a special hidden thing – the Fergality. How did you guys get that in? Did Acclaim or Midway know about it?**
I think the Fergality actually appeared in The Sun as a screenshot – that made our day! We always had a running joke about how we could get a Fergus head into the game. Actually, the first time I got Fergus' head into *Mortal Kombat* was the first game. Acclaim was showing the game at CES, and I got a phone call from Fergus saying "Why have I just seen my head bobbing along the sky on a massive screen?" I said "Well, it's only the cheat mode, they're not supposed to be running the cheat mode!" But because we'd got his head into *Mortal Kombat*, we thought about how we could get it in *Mortal Kombat II* and that's where the Fergality came from. Fergus moaned about it, but deep down he quite liked it.



# Kick Off 2

RETROREVIVAL

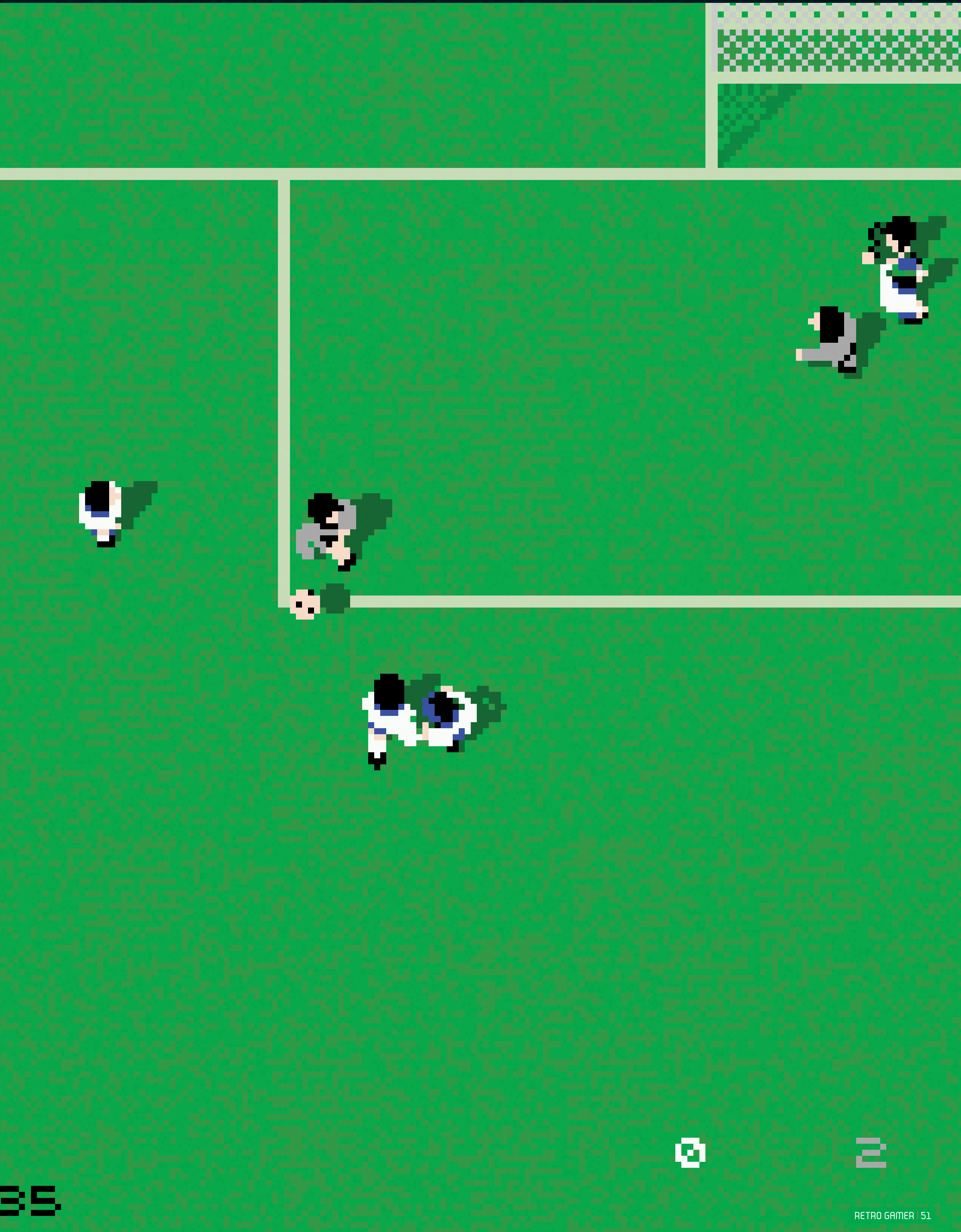
## CHRIS HILL REMEMBERS HIS DIGITAL DELIVERANCE FROM SPORTING SORROW

» AMIGA » DINO DINI » 1990

**It was 1990 – Italia 90 to be more exact. England had the World Cup winning team that never was. It was a heady summer. I was young enough to still play football on the pitch, yet old enough to get into a pub for a pint and watch… just. But as England fans, watching the World Cup meant facing despair against Germany in the semi-finals, and all that was left to do in the aftermath was kick the ball about and play videogames.**

We'd had *Kick Off* on the Amiga just a year earlier, but its sequel *Kick Off 2* had so many added extras. What's more, *Kick Off 2* gave us a release. I'd got it after the World Cup, even though it was out in the summer to coincide with all the football madness, and it was a blinder of a game. It was addictive as a single-player game, and practicing was key when you met your friends in a head to head two-player match. It was all about the sensitive touch of the ball and after a few hours you began to master the passing and careful dribbling. The curling of the ball was nice too – with certain runs along the wing you could knock one in or curl a pass to another player to shoot it in the back of the net.

But the most appealing for me was the Italia 90 mode – I could set this up and win the World Cup. Gazza's tears and Lineker's goals might have been a distant memory, but at last I was playing to the final as England and beating Germany. Dino Dini had delivered for me. *


35
2

# INTERTON ELECTRONIC VC 4000



# German manufacturer Interton launched its console into Europe in 1978 and scored with a cutting edge analogue controller, as David Crookes explains

When considering the games consoles of yesteryear, certain names trip off the tongue: the Atari 2600, the Sega Mega Drive, the SNES and so forth. Very few people would immediately offer the early 8-bit Interton VC 4000, which is widely claimed to be the only console – give or take the East German BSS 01 – to have been manufactured in Germany.

Perhaps this is an error on our part. After all, the blurb on the back of the box pulls no punches in its description of this machine. "The VC 4000 is a Video-Computer of the highest technical perfection," it says, rather grandly. "It functions like the master set of a big computer and it is a read and control unit for a large variety of Video Programmes." Whether or not you take that at face value, Interton's machine was groundbreaking to *some* degree. It came with a set of controllers containing a 12-key keypad and two red fire buttons. Cardboard templates, which came as part of the packaging for some games, could be overlaid on to the controllers to help players better understand which button to press.

But the main advance for the controllers was the presence of an analog joystick that auto-centred. Perched above the keyboard of each controller, its capabilities weren't fully utilised by every game but it made movements smoother and it would pave the way for future experiments by other companies including Atari and Nintendo.

The console itself was arguably less awe-inspiring and it is also hard to say with conviction whether Interton itself came up the design of the innards. The VC 4000 had been in the planning for four-years prior to its 1978 release and it boasted 37 bytes of RAM, 32 of which were for general purpose use and the rest for graphics and defining the sprites. It also had a resolution of 128x200 pixels and a single audio channel which had an analogue noise generator. The most intriguing parts were the Signetics 2650A processor running at 0.887Mhz and a Signetics 2636 Video Interface because Interton was not unique in using chips made by this American chip manufacturer.

Electronics giant Philips had bought Signetics in 1975 and it would appear it was touting the 2650A and the GPU to various companies. Manufacturers such as Interton saw it as the perfect solution in enabling it to dip a toe into the fledgling videogame market. It is no doubt why similar machines with similar specs were also produced, among them Radofin's 1292 Advanced Programmable Computer System which was made in 1976 – there is much overlap between this and the Interton with many games for both having identical names.

There are also some curiosities. Grundig made the Superplay Computer 4000 that could only be used with a Grundig television but was directly compatible with the Interton. Few of those companies had the much-needed experience of Interton in the videogame market, though.




» Games would not run when inserted and would require the pressing of the Reset button.



» Programme cassettes were inserted into the top of the machine.

## THE MANY FACES OF THE VC 4000

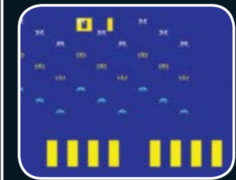
**The German console goes by many different names...**

- Interton: VC 4000
- Grundig: Super Play Computer 4000
- Radofin: 1292 Advanced Programmable Video System
- Radofin: 1392 Advanced Programmable Video System
- Hanimex: HMG-1292 Advanced Programmable Video System
- Hanimex: HMG-1392 Advanced Programmable Video System
- Fountain: Force 2
- Fountain: 1292 Advanced Programmable Video System
- Fountain: 1392 Advanced Programmable Video System
- Grandstand: Advanced Programmable Video System
- Lansay: Lansay 1392
- Audio Sonic: PP-1292 Advanced Programmable Video System
- Audio Sonic: PP-1392 Advanced Programmable Video System
- Prinztronic: VC-6000
- Prinztronic: Tournament
- Acetronic: MPU-1000
- Acetronic: MPU-2000
- Videomaster: Database
- Waddington/Voltmace: Database
- Rowtron: Television Computer System
- Karvan: Jeu Video TV (Karvan Video TV Game)
- Societe Occitane Electronique: OC-2000
- ITMC: MPT-05



# ESSENTIAL GAMES

Give your Interton a work out with the following classics



### INVADERS

■ Containing cloned variations of *Space Invaders*, this game sure is slow, only emphasising how the speed of the 1978 classic was so important. It makes *Invaders* too easy, allowing shots to be easily anticipated and avoided. The enemies are too widely spaced to be a real threat as well.



### MONSTER MAN

■ This is a fun *Pac-Man* clone in which you avoid creatures while collecting items. It doesn't have the charm of the original but the idea is to get as high a score as possible in a game that moves along at blistering pace. The tension is heightened thanks to increasingly frantic audio.



### SOCCER

■ The rules of football are be familiar to all, but what makes *Soccer* unique is that each of the 11 players are assigned a button on the controller keypad while leaving the extra button available for kicking, with a nifty aim of the analog stick. It's not end-to-end stuff like *FIFA* but it makes for great fun.



### OUTER SPACE COMBAT

■ Available to play solo or with a friend and also coming in two speeds, the first game of *Outer Space Combat* asks players to shoot at enemy ships that fall within your sights. If you get fed up with that, there is a second game which is about docking a spaceship.




### COCKPIT

■ This wonderful flight sim poses a challenge, making good use of the joysticks to keep the plane in the air. If you mess up, you get animated sequence showing your pilot parachuting to safety but there isn't much else to see with the action playing out via the dials and gauges before you.

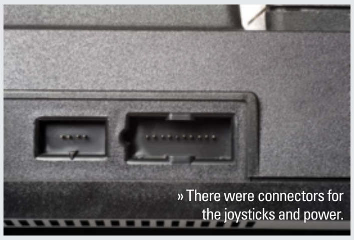


### METROPOLIS/ HANGMAN

■ It's odd that people would have thrown cash at a game that's a pen-and-paper classic but this is an impressive videogame, showing a large sprite of the man edging his way up a platform to the noose. It's gruesome when his face turns red but it's a nice twist.



» The Interton VC-4000 was the first console to have analogue joysticks.



» There were connectors for the joysticks and power.

Interton, which was founded back in 1962, had manufactured a series of *Pong* clones, including the cartridge-based Video 2000, the Video 2400 and the Video 3001, each produced under licences. The VC 4000 was its first fully-fledged and varied videogame console and, on the face of it, it was an attractive, if not oversized, beast.

The machine had four buttons along the front, which included an on/off switch and a button that looked like a rewind logo but actually functioned as a Reset button. It needed to be pressed when a 'Programme-Cassette' (read: game) was inserted into the machine in order to write the code into memory. There was also a forward-facing arrow button which would allow games to be selected, and Start which got the action going. The two controllers sat in their own carriers to the left and right, on the main unit, similar to the Intellivision.

The machine's reset button highlighted how underpowered the Eurpean console was. If a player performed the action of simply entering a cartridge into the machine, the Interton was unable to automatically work out that there was a game in there ready to be played. This was due to the console having a shortage of CPU RAM and that the makers did not want to waste any on the system's boot-up. When the Reset button was pressed, an instruction was loaded which asked the machine's CPU to take a root around the RAM of the Programmable Video Interface. Obviously, it wasn't a major issue once players got used to it, but it was certainly one of those times when the instructions came in handy.

**"Interton's policy was to let the world know about its games first and look to code them second"**

**The machine was released for a European market, and it hit the shop shelves in multiple countries, from Austria to** the Netherlands (although it was released in Australia too). It retailed for 500 DM in Germany (undercutting competitors by around 100 DM) and 1,200 francs in France.




» Boxes showed off lovely artwork. Each one was also labelled with a number.

Adverts were also placed in UK magazines in 1978. These carried an address in Aldershot, Hampshire and they suggested that Interton had set up a British limited company. A similar situation existed in Spain where a company called Interton Electronic Iberica SA appeared to handle distribution. The console retailed at a price of £129.95 in the UK.

Each of the games used between 2KB and 4KB of space. They could make use of eight colours and there were 8x10 pixel sprites available. It was also possible to utilise scanline interrupts (which could be seen in the ski jump component of *Winter Games*).

As if to underline its European credentials, instructions for each game were written in German, English and French and the titles were given their own numbers to create a series. There were supposed to be 40 games in total, but only 37 were released. Interton's policy was to let the world know about its forthcoming games first and look for someone to code them second. It didn't always work out as planned.

Programmer Hans-Heinz Bieling says *Rodeo*, which should have been game 35 but was never published, suffered because it wasn't possible to present the long lassos needed, adding that the game needed more than the four sprites that could be displayed side-by-side. *Space Laser*, a game Hans was in the process of creating should have been numbered 34 but it ground to a halt due to money problems at Interton. *Basketball* was the third unpublished game, leaving a gap at number 39. These titles have since caused frustration for collectors but an intriguing situation for those who like to find 'games that weren't'.





» The controllers neatly fitted into slots created either side of the console.

## AFTER THE ANALOGUE

**The Intertron got their first, but it wasn't to be the last…**

### ATARI 5200



■ Six years after Interton introduced the analogue stick, Atari produced a version of its own. But unlike the VC-4000, it was non-centering which made it a pain to use with certain games and it was also tended to break too easily. The controllers marred the experience of playing the 2600's high-end cousin.

### VECTREX



■ The designers of the Vectrex controller decided to incorporate an analog joystick so that players would be able to take advantage of the 360-degree potential of the console's vector capabilities. Few games made use of the control, though, likely because of the processing demands it would cause.

### DREAMCAST



■ With the trend for analog now an expectation among gamers, Sega built upon the analog pad that was bundled with *Nights Into Dreams* in Japan. The controller for the Dreamcast had a single analog stick and two analog triggers but it wasn't entirely popular among critics thanks to its uncomfortable 'feel'.

### NINTENDO 64



■ Nintendo used analog stick technology when it launched the N64. The stick would turn two wheels inside the controller which would alter the light shining from a LED to a photo cell. The console could use this to work out the angle of the joystick.

### PLAYSTATION



■ Sony had produced the PlayStation Analog Joystick in 1996. A year later, Sony released the Dual Analog Controller before redesigning it as the DualShock which was then bundled as standard. Notably, the latter two controllers had two analog sticks.

Hans did create a published game for the Interton, though – *Motocross* – and he was also part of a line-up of some accomplished Interton programmers such as Martin Greiner who produced *Cockpit* (cassette 28), PJ Dickers who created *Metropolis/Hangman* (cassette 29) and Andrew Choi who coded *Invaders* (32), a game that had obvious origins but fewer sprites on the screen than other versions.

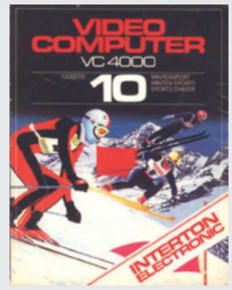
Andrew tended to put hidden text in his games which kind of makes up for any on-screen shortfalls, for those who like that kind of thing anyway. They were nothing to special - the acronym "ACHOI" (meaning Andrew Choi) can be found at the end of *Invaders*' compiled code – but the fact that Andrew also noted that he was from Hong Kong flew in the face of Interton's claims that all of its games were German-made.

**There were some pioneering gems, though, and many games aimed to provide value-for-money. *Car Races*** was labelled as game number one and it contained ten different variations including a one or two-player racing game, a rally circuit and three slalom tracks. Other decent titles included *Hunting*, *Chess*, *Blackjack* and *Soccer*, the latter being particularly interesting.

*Soccer* was game 24 and one of the earliest recreations of the beautiful game. By making excellent use of the controller's buttons, it was possible to control every one of the 11 footballers on your team individually. It even incorporated the offside rule. The game was proof that programmers would think long and hard about making the most of the system.

To make it easy to spot an Interton game on the shop shelves, the game's covers were made to follow a similar house style with the large VC 4000 logo emblazoned across the top, the number of the game underneath and some very distinctive and well-drawn artwork whether it was an action title or one of the board games titles that were seemingly popular.

Interton wanted each game title to be self-explanatory, too, much like Atari. The idea was that they had to be familiar to encourage gamers to pick them off the shelf. Indeed, the concepts behind them were often taken from the Atari 2600: *Circus* was similar to *Circus Atari,* for instance. There were numerous clones too, from variations on *Pong*, as you would expect, to a rather enjoyable clone of *Pac-Man*.




» The name of the game seemed less important than the name of the system.

The arrival of the tape-based Elektor TV Games Computer helped to boost the Interton. Like the console, the Elektor used the Signetics 2650 CPU and the 2636 PVI and, when it was released in 1979, programmers saw how easy it would be to port titles across to the VC 4000. Bieling's *Motocross,* for example, was originally *Dragster.* It was coded for the Elektor but adapted for the Interton, and given a change of name in order to fill a promised slot in the catalogue. It was released as cartridge number 14.

As with many companies involved with earlier generation consoles, Interton became a victim of the videogames crash although adverts were seen in some magazines as late as 1984. The VC 4000 was the company's last foray into the industry even though a backwards-compatible console was being developed as a successor. It would have used a 2650 processor but with more memory and a Signetics 2637 UVI to replace the 2636 PVI but it was never released. Interton fell into financial difficulty and it was sold to a company called GN Hearing GmbH.

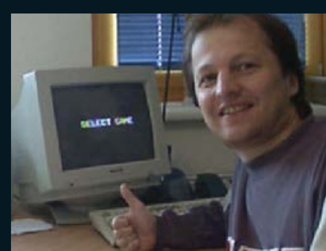
Despite the company's success in videogames at a time of harsh competition, its website makes no mention of its console and jumps from 1962 to 1985. In doing so, it sadly glosses over one of the lesser-known but important chapters of gaming. *




**Many thanks to Dieter König for the box scans and general assistance.**

## INTO INTERTON

**Dieter König who has been running the retro game site Classic Consoles Center since 1997 has every published Interton game**



**What attracted you to the Interton?**
Since I started collecting consoles in the early Nineties I have been attracted by obscure systems like the Interton VC4000, the Hanimex HMG2650 and the Creativision. Few people collected for those so it was probably the appeal of the unknown.

**How popular was it in Europe?**
Well, not very popular. Maybe a bit in Germany, Interton's country of origin. There were, however, some clones, for example from *Rowtron*, *Radofin*, *Hanimex* and *Voltmace*, which were sold in many European countries and in Australia. The carts were not interchangeable with the Interton, but they were code compatible. But in the early Noughties a UK collector found a converter in the wild that allowed to play Voltmace cartridges on the Interton VC4000.

**How did the analogue joystick make a difference?**
Some games really played better. The analogue joystick allowed smoother and more precise movement – if the game was well programmed. You have to get used to it but I soon liked it.

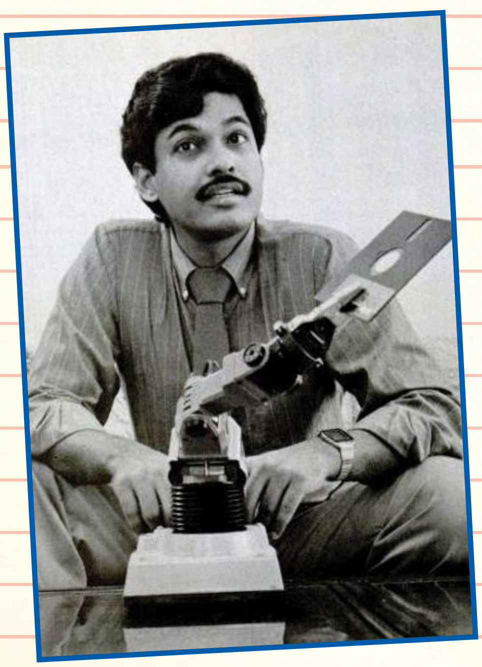
**Which of your games were the hardest to find?**
*Backgammon* (game number 36), *Motocross* (number 14) and the last game that was released, *Super-Space* (number 40).

Special thanks to The National Videogame Arcade for supplying their Interton Electronic VC 4000 consoles for the photography in this issue.




# Human Engineered Software

**Human Engineered Software might not be a familiar name with today's gamers but it was one of the first true power publishers, leading the way with their quality computer software. Kieren Hawken investigates its rapid rise to fame**



**HES, or HesWare as it was lately known, was a company simply bursting at the seams with talented individuals. Its** alumni includes such notable names as Jeff '*Sheep In Space*' Minter, Ron '*Monkey Island*' Gilbert and Larry '*The Bard's Tale*' Holland. But there was one man who was the key to whole company, and we can't tell this story properly without him, founder and CEO of the company, Jay Balakrishnan. Jay graduated university with a bachelors degree in Finance and a minor in Computer Science. From there he started his first job in February 1978 working for GTE Data Services (a large telecoms company) in Los Angeles. While here he programmed systems in COBOL on state of the art IBM 370 mainframes. Then in April 1978 he bought his first computer of his own, a Commodore PET 2001, with just 8192 bytes RAM, for a staggering $800.

"Back then, I was so passionate about computer languages and programming," remarks Jay. "I woke up each morning literally jumping out of bed, eager to program!" It wasn't long before Jay moved on, wanting to further his knowledge of computer systems, and in the summer of 1980 he ended up working at Hughes Helicopters, programming financial systems for Apache AH64 helicopters. But then he suddenly remembered a goal he had made himself five years earlier. "I promised myself that that when I turned 25, I'd start my own company" recalls Jay. "So on my 25th birthday, I legally registered Human Engineered Software and operated it in the evenings after work, in my one-bedroom apartment!" And that was the beginning of what would become one of the biggest names in software in the early Eighties.

Having already been a Commodore man since his PET purchase Jay






» [Atari 8-bit] HesWare's *The Pond* is an example of how the company combined education with arcade gameplay.

decided that the VIC-20 should become the first format that he focused on. Jack Tramiel's computer had been selling like hot cakes and was quickly becoming a favourite among gamers looking for a more serious computer thanks to its full colour graphics. HES needed some great new games to publish if it was going to take advantage of this boon and a chance meeting with Jeff Minter would give HES just that. "I first met Jeff in England in the summer 1982 at a tiny tradeshow booth playing his new VIC-20 game, *Defenda*," Jay remembers. "The graphics speed and smoothness instantly caught my eye, it couldn't be written in BASIC, like 95 per cent of games back then." Jeff himself also recalls this chance meeting, "A smartly-dressed American gentleman in a suit approached me on the stand one day and started asking me questions about *Defenda*. It turned out that he was from a US software house which was interested in getting into the games market and was at the show looking for potential titles to distribute in the US.

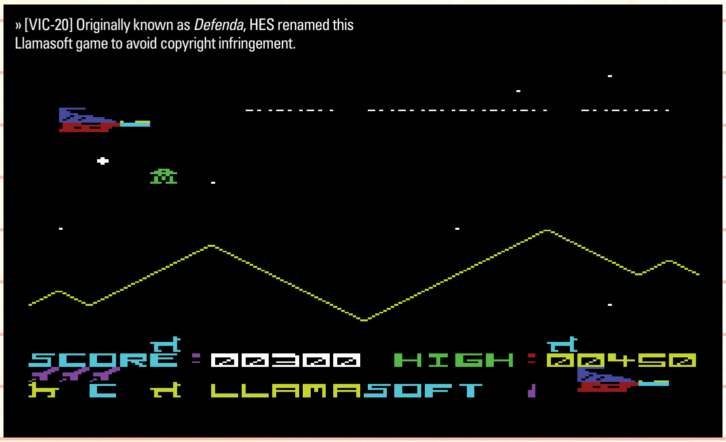


» A huge investment into the company allowed Jay Balakrishnan to hire Leonard Nimoy as its official spokesperson.

> **"I appreciated Jeff was one of a few, world-class 6502 microprocessor programmers at the time and I have fun memories of those days we worked together"**
> Jay Balakrishnan

His eye had been taken by my clunky *Defenda* and he started asking me if I was interested in doing a deal (yes, yes I was!) and if I could put the game on a ROM cartridge that would work in the unexpanded VIC, I had no idea how the hell to go about producing a ROM, but I said that yes, I could!" We go back to Jay and ask him about the rather unusual way that deal was done. "I talked enthusiastically about his game's potential and liked Jeff right away. He invited me to his house that evening, where I was interviewed by his parents. We all liked and trusted each other and I had come prepared, with a printed Licensing Agreement. We signed the contract that evening for HES to exclusively sell his Llamasoft games in North America." And that was the start of a beautiful friendship that would bring much success for Jay, and he still very much admires Jeff to this day. "Jeff Minter has abundantly proven he is highly talented and fearlessly unique," he says. "I appreciated Jeff was one of a few, world-class 6502 microprocessor programmers at the time and I have fun memories of those days we worked together. I hope we meet again one day."

**Another famous name that Jay Balakrishnan came to hire and work with was Ron Gilbert, who is most** famously known for his time at LucasArts producing games such as *The Secret Of Monkey Island*, *Zak McKracken* and *Maniac Mansion* among many others. "Back in 1984 I received Ron Gilbert's submission of a C64 programmer's toolkit," Jay remembers. "He was working as a disc jockey at a small radio station in Oregon state. Being very enthusiastic about Ron and his program, I signed a ▶




» [VIC-20] Originally known as *Defenda*, HES renamed this Llamasoft game to avoid copyright infringement.

## In the know

- HES produced the first ever home 6502 assembler package.
- Ron Gilbert's 2013 hit *The Cave* was first conceived whilst working at HES.
- One of the key investors in HES was computer giant Microsoft.
- *Protector*, first published by HES in 1981 spawned four sequels.
- HES was responsible for unleashing the surreal games of Jeff Minter on America.
- The official spokesperson of HES was none other than Leonard Nimoy.
- HES also produced games for the likes of Sega, Xonox and IBM.
- The famous Turtle graphics robot was first marketed by HES.
- A huge amount of HES' success came from educational games.
- HES produced the first ever C64 modem.




» Ron Gilbert's very own copy of Graphics BASIC, his first ever commercial software release.




# HesWare




© Rama & Musée Bolo

## Timeline

**1978** A young Jay Balakrishnan buys his first home computer, a Commodore PET and starts programming.

**1980** After a self-kept promise Jay forms Human Engineered Software as a part-time business.

**1981** Jay quits his full-time job at Hughes Helicopters to devote himself 100 per cent to running HES.

**1982** Hardware company USI take a controlling interest in HES and relocates it to San Francisco.

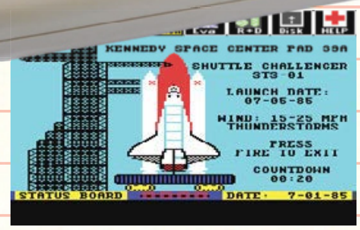
**1983** HES receives a $4.5 million investment from Microsoft and two other parties to take the company forward.

**1984** The company becomes one of the many victims of the North American videogame crash.

**1985** Jay forms his new company Solid State Software and has tremendous success in the business market.

▶ licensing agreement, to sell it as HESBASIC. I then hired him as a full-time HES programmer." Ron himself looks back at his HES days with a lot of respect. "It was my first job in the games business and actually my first real job anywhere. There was so much to learn about everything and before that job, I had no idea how games were made or companies worked." In fact, as it turns out, we might have never got to see any of those great LucasArts titles if it wasn't for Jay Balakrishnan and HES, as Ron explains. "Around six months after I was hired, the company laid nearly everyone off and I was one of them. So I moved back to Oregon and was getting ready to go back to college when Lucasfilm called me. They had gotten my name from someone at HES, so if not for my days at HES, I wouldn't have gotten the job at Lucasfilm and there would be no *Maniac Mansion* or *Monkey Island*!" Even after all this time and all the best-selling games HES still continues to influence Ron's career as he explains to us passionately. "I came up with the basic idea for my game *The Cave* when I worked at HES and as it turns out I would end up making that game some 30 years later." The question is did Jay himself know back then that Ron would go on to become such a huge part of videogame history? "I have followed




» [Commodore 64] *Project Space Station* was an incredibly realistic simulation of the original NASA missions.




» [Commodore 64] *Spike's Peak* appeared on a double pack with the equally enjoyable *Ghost Manor*.

his career ever since those early days" remarks Jay before adding, "I have always thought very well of Ron, he has always been very talented."

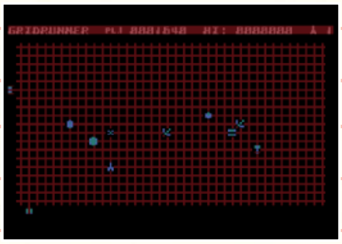
**As it turned out games wouldn't be the only foray HES would make into the software world. Ron Gilbert's** HESBASIC would be just a small part of it as he followed this up with a title to teach kids about the human immune system before going on to greater things. But Jay always intended to make more than just videogames, as he was quick to explain. "Some 40 years ago, before there wasn't any 'video', in 'videogames'. I played my first computer game, *Lunar Lander*, a one-page BASIC program, it was played on an IBM Mainframe 'bouncing ball' typewriter terminal. It was fun and you also learned physics and how to accurately fire rockets to avoid crashing on the moon. My favourite games have always been ones where there is learning, alongside the fun, within your imagination. I always called this stealth learning." It was HES' educational ventures that actually led to one of its biggest moments in the spotlight and an endorsement from a major Hollywood star, one Leonard Nimoy, better known to *Star Trek* fans as Mr Spock. We had to ask Jay how this meeting of minds came about. "Well, it's an interesting story. In 1982, I licensed Turtle Graphics, HES' very first educational

# Defining games




### Protector 1981

Released for the VIC-20 and Atari 8-bit, *Protector* could be easily dismissed as just another *Defender* clone but there is so much more to it than that. The basic concept is the same, to rescue the humans from an alien invasion – but it's much more strategic than Eugene Jarvis' famous arcade game. The player must rescue each human one by one and then return them to your base. Once this is done you must then transport them to another planet through a star gate. *Protector* received rave reviews upon release and also spawned several sequels.




### Gridrunner 1982

Programmed by the legendary Jeff Minter, *Grid Runner* was his first really big success and the game that put Llamasoft on the map. HES published the VIC-20, C64 and Atari 8-bit versions of the game. Initially based on *Centipede* but with enough new features to make it an original game, the game's psychedelic graphics would become his trademark. Famously, Jeff claims to have coded the game in just one week. It still remains one of his favourite projects and he recently resurrected the game as *Gridrunner++* for mobile devices to much acclaim.



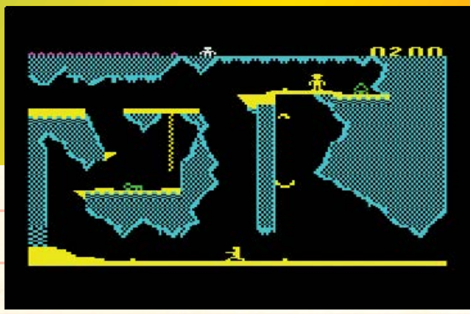

### Super Zaxxon 1982

After seeing the success of *Zaxxon* on home systems, Sega chose to release the sequel to its hugely popular isometric shooter itself but turned to HES to code it. *Super Zaxxon* was pretty much more of the same but with the difficulty ramped up a tad. It played faster, had a new boss and featured some slightly improved visuals. Published for the PC, C64, Apple II and Atari 8-bit, these conversions all stacked up very well with Larry Holland's C64 and A8 iterations being of particular note receiving favourable reviews in the press of the time.




### Mr. TNT 1983

Part of HES' arcade series, *Mr. TNT* is a conversion of the obscure Telko/Sanchez coin-op of the same name. This highly original title was released for both the Atari 8-bit and Commodore 64 computers and sees you controlling the titular character as he tries to defuse the stacks of dynamite around a grid of fuses. But once the fuses have been passed over they disappear and the four flames are also chasing you. *Mr. TNT* is a pretty unforgiving game but one with enough addictive qualities to keep you coming back for more.




» [VIC-20] *The Pharaoh's Curse* was released for both the VIC-20 and Atari 8-bit, receiving excellent reviews from the press of the time.

entertainment product. The $4.5 million investment included a healthy budget to develop a new brand of edutainment titles. This caused me, in late-1983, to negotiate and sign Leonard Nimoy as HES' spokesman." This was quite the coup for HES and gained it some huge publicity, solidifying its position as one of the top ten software publishers in North America. In fact, in the April 1984 issue of *InfoWorld* magazine there was an article published examining who the biggest players in the North American software market were and the earnings chart for 1983 put HES above such notable names as Broderbund, Sierra On-Line and Epyx.

**One of HES' most successful titles that mixed the worlds of videogames and educational software was** *Project Space Station*. This highly ambitious project would be the first ever game by one Lawrence 'Larry' Holland, who would later go on to great success with titles such as *The Bard's Tale* and *Star Trek: Bridge Commander*. We'll let Larry explain in his own words just what this title was trying to achieve. "It was a simulation game involving the construction, research and development activities on America's initial long term

> **"I had no idea how the hell to go about producing a ROM, but I said that yes, I could, and trusted I'd find out how later"** Jeff Minter

space station project. The core design was based on and accurately modelled the Space Shuttle and other NASA space technology. In so many ways *Project: Space Station* was a forerunner product for the industry, a harbinger of things to come. This was my first full design effort that ventured into space and many more of my later products would explore this same landscape from all sorts of other directions. This product was also the beginning of a strong interest in simulating a complex worlds based on real life machinery and technology." And Larry was right, space would become somewhat of a theme for him as his next game also involved shuttles and space stations too, but in an arcade environment, with HES' acquisition of the *Super Zaxxon* contract for Sega. Larry looks back at this coin-op conversion with a lot of fondness. "It's hard to believe that over 20 years ago I was working on a Sega arcade title. Though it's not surprising that even back then the games I was ▶

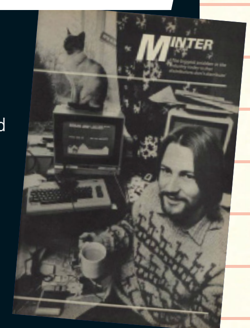
# Hes Ware

## The DNA of HES

### Coming First

HES managed several firsts in the industry that should not be forgotten. It made the very first C64 cartridge game, first home assembler package and revolutionised the edutainment sector. It was this innovation that saw one Bill Gates and his now multi-million earning corporation Microsoft make a huge investment in the company.

### Voyage Of Discovery




Founder Jay Balakrishnan wanted to diversify HES from its North American competitors so he decided to scour Europe for its best talent. It was during his many trade show visits that led to the fateful meeting between Jay Balakrishnan and Jeff Minter and ended up being responsible for some of HES' biggest hits.

### Industry Legends

HES might have been a small independent publisher but it set some of the biggest names in the video game industry off on the route to success. Larry '*The Bard's Tale*' Holland, Jeff 'Llamasoft' Minter and Ron '*Monkey Island*' Gilbert all began their careers at Human Engineered Software.

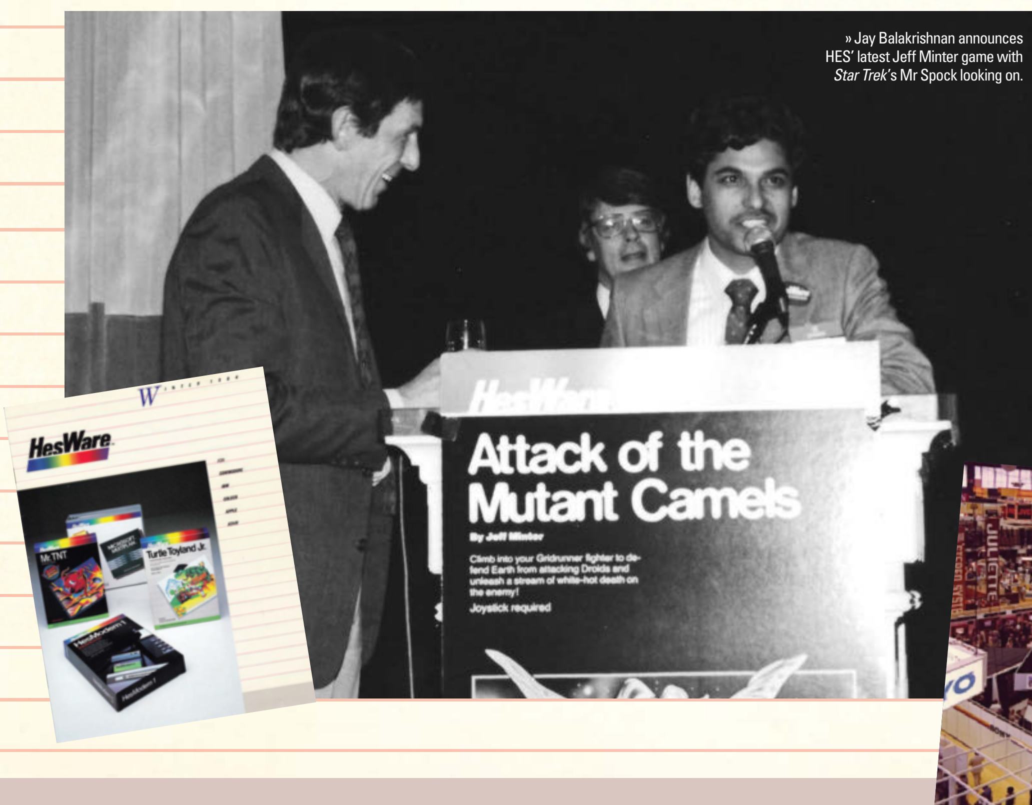
### Arcade Obscurity




Keen to get into the booming market of arcade conversions, HES turned to long forgotten coin-op manufacturer Telko/Sanchez to provide the games. With all the big companies already having agreements in place, HES had to make do with games such as *Mr. TNT*, *The Pit* and *Eggor* for its own arcade label.

### Learning Is Fun

The education sector proved to be a huge source of revenue for HES. It was always the mission of the company to make learning fun and they certainly succeeded with a serious of educational programs that added in arcade game elements to make them much more appealing to its young audience.




» Jay Balakrishnan announces HES' latest Jeff Minter game with *Star Trek*'s Mr Spock looking on.



# HesWare

## Where Are They Now?



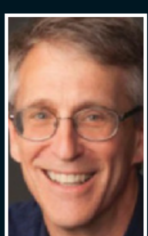
### Jay Balakrishnan

Since his days with HES Jay has continued to work in the games industry for some of the biggest names out there. On his vast portfolio you will find roles with such notable companies as Mindscape, where he managed the key strategic relationship with Nintendo and licensed its *Mario Brothers* characters for the first time ever for edutainment games. An executive producer position with Sierra On-Line, where he headed up 50-person Simulation Games Division, and also worked in the same role at both Wild Tangent and Radical Entertainment. He is now teaching other people how to make their mark in the industry.



### Jeff Minter

What can we really say about the career of Jeff Minter? He is doing the same thing he has always done, make crazy and more often than not brilliant games under the guise of his own Llamasoft label. Although the self-proclaimed Ox is now focusing his attention on mobile gaming his influence on the industry certainly still felt. He was most recently in the news due to his court battles with Atari over his *Tempest 2000* remake *TxK* that was set to be released on further platforms following its PS Vita debut in early 2014.



### Larry Holland

Since leaving HES, Larry set up his own company Totally Games, that he still runs to this day. Under this umbrella he has worked on games for such notable companies as LucasArts, Sega, Activision and Disney. He has also done consultancy and contract work for a number of other companies including Time Lapse, where he focused on producing mobile games, and Asylum Labs, which specialises in the social gaming sector.



### Ron Gilbert

Ron Gilbert is undoubtedly most famous for his years with LucasArts where he developed the *SCUMM* engine and subsequently many of the company's most famous and successful games. Roles at Humongous Entertainment, Cavedog, Beep Games, Hulabee and, most recently Double Fine have followed and the hits have kept flowing. Despite his fame Ron has never forgotten his roots and still regularly updates his Grumpy Gamer blog.

**Top 20 microcomputer-software companies by 1983 sales figures**

*Figures were provided by the companies, company insiders and industry analysts.*

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | MicroPro International | $60,000,000 | | Broderbund Software | 13,000,000 |
| 2 | Microsoft | 55,000,000 | 12 | Sierra On-line | 12,500,000 |
| 3 | Lotus Development | 53,000,000 | 13 | Sorcim | 12,000,000 |
| 4 | Digital Research | 45,000,000 | | Software Arts | 12,000,000 |
| 5 | VisiCorp | 43,000,000 | 15 | Sirius Software | 11,000,000 |
| 6 | Ashton-Tate | 35,000,000 | 16 | Epyx | 10,000,000 |
| 7 | Peachtree Software | 21,700,000 | | Perfect Software | 10,000,000 |
| 8 | Microfocus | 15,000,000 | | Softword Systems | 10,000,000 |
| 9 | Software Publishing | 14,000,000 | | Spinnaker Software | 10,000,000 |
| 10 | Human Engineered Software | 13,000,000 | | Information Unlimited Software | 10,000,000 |

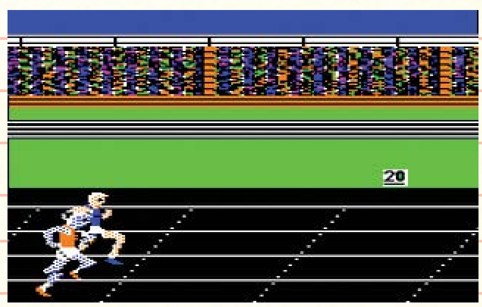
Source: SoftLetter

» Human Engineered Software soon solidified its position as one of the biggest software publishers in North America.

> **"In so many ways Project: Space Station was a forerunner product for the industry, a harbinger of things to come"**
> Larry Holland

working on had space elements and science fiction themes, in some ways I anticipating my future work with Sega on the *Alien Syndrome* reboot." *Super Zaxxon*, for those that don't know, was simply an enhancement of the original *Zaxxon* game with a few extra bells and whistles. Like the original game it was known for being a technical marvel of the time, so how did Larry cope with converting this arcade game to humble 8-bit hardware? "There were several challenges with this game," he begins. "The first was the need to achieve arcade style graphics on the C64, no mean feat. And the second was that we only had only six weeks to develop the game from scratch."

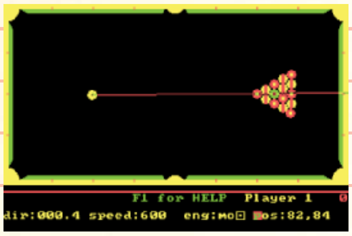
**HES' huge success made other people sit up and take notice, especially one particular software company which was** starting to do some pretty big things in the computer world itself: Microsoft. But this was not the first company to take notice in HES as Jay reveals to us. "In 1981 I wrote more programs and licensed more VIC-20 tools and games from the US and Europe than anyone else. In March 1982, I accepted an offer from USI, a hardware company, to buy majority ownership in HES and relocate the company to San Francisco. By August 1983, HES was doing very well and gained a $4.5 million investment from Microsoft and two other investors. Soon after, HES was rebranded, as HesWare." Jay then went on to explain more about how this huge deal came about "Microsoft had invested in HES in 1983 to gain access to the home computer mass market where they had virtually no presence at this time. Microsoft then licensed its C64 Multiplan Spreadsheet exclusively to HesWare. So the partnership was good for both of us." But it wasn't all smooth sailing and what initially turned out to be a profitable agreement for both parties started to turn sour as Jay explained further. "In early 1984, Microsoft ported its huge hit game, *Flight Simulator*, to C64. With Multiplan selling very well, HesWare was undoubtedly also the best choice to sell this C64 game. So we negotiated seriously for several months with Microsoft vice president Steve Ballmer (who was also a HesWare Board Director), and we were shocked when finally Microsoft



» [Apple II] *HES Games* was one of the company's most popular titles and was later re-released by US Gold under the title *Go For The Gold*.






» [PC] *Pool Challenge* was designed and programmed by HES for PC platform innovators IBM.

refused to license it. This was a great loss of revenue and deteriorated the relationship with Microsoft." By the summer of 1984 HesWare was suffering in a situation Jay lays firmly at the feet of the great videogames crash. He had to find a way out of it and thought he had found the answer. "With the brand name established in games and edutainment for computers, I thought it was critical that HesWare diversify into business products for the C64 and IBM PC. So I tried repeatedly to license ViziStar, a Lotus 1-2-3 type business application for C64, but I was turned down by the rest of the board. Foreseeing HesWare's demise, I became frustrated, which I did not handle very well. I left HesWare in October 1984, and two months later HesWare filed bankruptcy." But this wouldn't be the last we heard of Jay or ViziStar. "I founded a new company called Solid State Software to market that C64 ViziStar. This company went on to do well financially and ViziStar won many awards, like the CES Award for Best Productivity Software of 1986. It became the number one productivity software for C64, which in turn became the best-selling computer of all time!"



**HES might have had a fairly short life in the videogame industry but nobody can doubt that it was a very** impactful one that set several people up for the greatness that followed. So it would be remiss of us not to finish this story with some words from the founder about the legacy it left. "HES pioneered many firsts," boasts Jay proudly. "The first 6502 assembler, first bio-feedback game device, first computer Modem, first C64 music synthesizer and, even before Commodore, we sold the first ever C64 cartridge – *Retro Ball*. I am also proud to have worked with many great, talented people like Jeff, Ron and the many celebrities. HES was the first company to always credit the author of every product prominently on the package." So did Jay's original vision of HES fit the story that's been left in the company's place? "I had no vision at all!" he quips. "I didn't even know I was supposed to have one! Life had turned out great, until then, without having one. Truthfully, did not worry or give any thought to the future, or how much money I could make with HES. It did not occur to once me that I could fail, or that I could succeed. It was a clean, open slate entrepreneurial venture with no pre-defined conditions – I was doing the work purely because I loved it." *

**Special thanks to Jay Balakrishnan, Larry Holland, Jeff Minter and Ron Gilbert.**




## A Human Engineered Legacy

### HES alumni continue to find success

One of the most apparent things when you look at the HES library is the titles that have lived on and remained in the spotlight. Developed by Double Fine Productions and published by Sega, *The Cave* was released across numerous platforms back in 2013 and a game that Ron Gilbert originally designed back in his HES days. The original *Protector* game was first published for the Atari 8-bit back in 1981, fast forward to 2014 and the fifth game in the series was published for another Atari machine, the Jaguar CD, by Songbird Productions. Of course Jeff Minter's legacy from his HES days is pretty much second to none with several of his early games, including the excellent *Gridrunner*, being resurrected for release on modern mobile devices. And many people out there will certainly remember crashing the Turtle into the walls of their computer studies room at school.



» [PC] Ron Gilbert's *The Cave* was released across numerous platforms to in 2013, Ron's original concept for the game was dreamed up at HES.

# Minority Report

## CLASSIC GAMES YOU'VE NEVER PLAYED







## GAME BOY

**For almost a decade, the Game Boy had no real competition on the handheld playing field. With such a long, monolithic reign, plenty of games got looked over. Jonny Dimaline takes a look at some of them here**

# ULTRAMAN BALL

■ DEVELOPER: BEC ■ YEAR: 1994

Though the title sounds like it might be a super deformed mascot sports game, it's actually a super deformed mascot platformer, starring the iconic Japanese TV hero. Though, subverting your expectations again, he neither wrestles nor shoots lasers at the monsters in this game, instead turning, at the press of a button, into a ball with his own face on it. This ball form easily dispatches enemies on contact, but the real core of the game is in using it to navigate the stages. Your ball form can move a lot faster and bounce higher than your regular form, and it's immune to spikes, the cost being that it's much harder to control, and you can easily fall down pits if you're not careful. Conversely, your humanoid form is slow and can't jump very high, but it can climb walls and obviously, you have complete control over where it goes and how fast.

After a few easy stages, that allow you to build a decent stock of extra lives as well as learn the strengths and weaknesses of your two forms, the game starts to really test your skill. As soon as you beat the first boss, the following stages expect you to know your limits, they also test your ability to know exactly when to change between forms to get over obstacles and avoid pits and enemy attacks alike.

As a game, it's definitely worth playing: the ball transformation gimmick works well and enables a lot of fun risk-taking gameplay, both in terms of trying to get items in hard-to-reach areas, and in just trying to get through stages as quickly as possible using the tools at your disposal. The only downside is that enemies seem to have been thrown into stages as an afterthought: they're very easy to defeat without

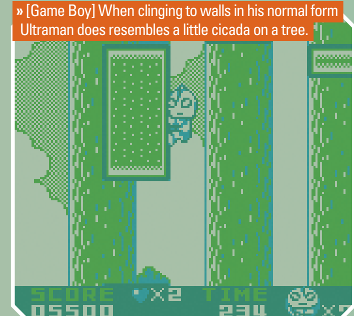
» [Game Boy] Once you find the right rhythm in the bonus stage, you can earn loads of extra lives.



» [Game Boy] Flying stages add nothing to the game, they don't even use the game's main gimmick.



» [Game Boy] When clinging to walls in his normal form Ultraman does resembles a little cicada on a tree.

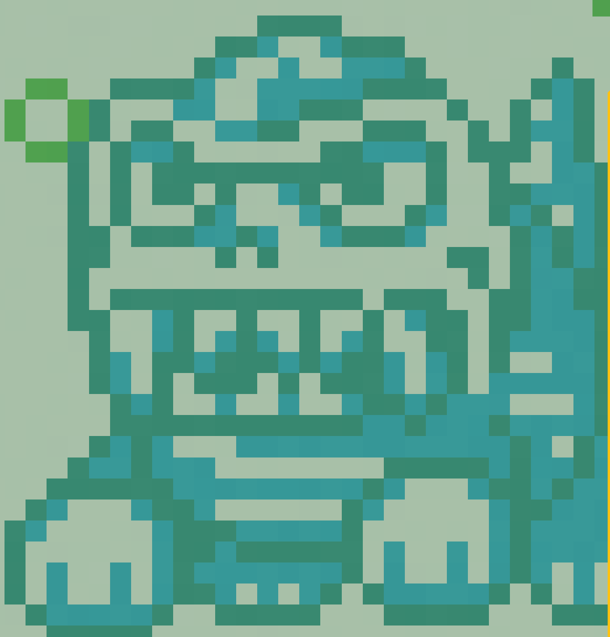


» [Game Boy] Though Ultraman usually faces his foes in cities, the game offers more varied environments.

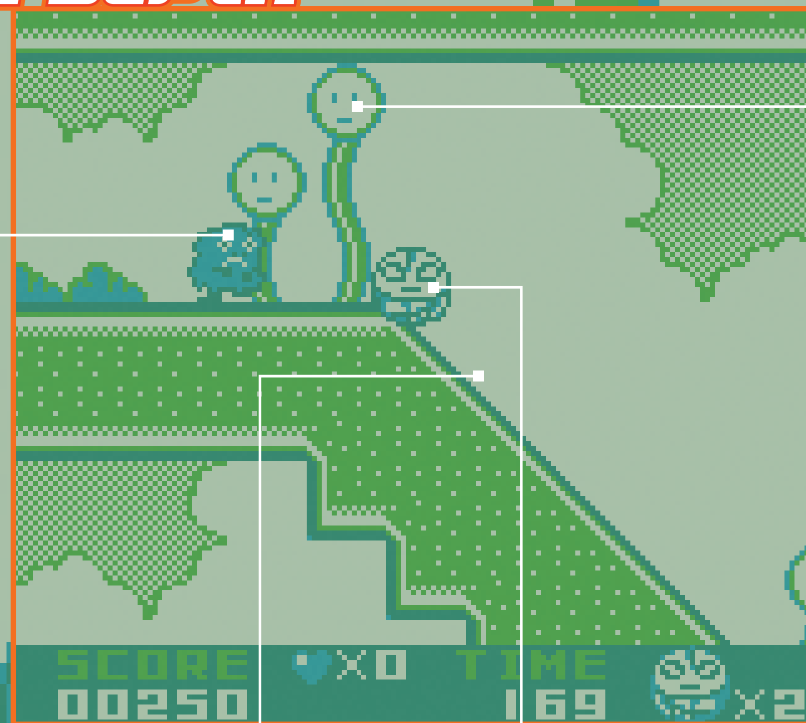


even trying and they just seem to potter about back and forth doing nothing otherwise. Since it's a platform game, there's no language barrier to those of you curious enough to track it down – unless you really need to be able to read the skippable cutscenes between each stage. Having said that, though, the actual tracking down itself might be an obstacle, as copies seem to be pretty sparse, very sparse, even.

Of course, it's far from a typical adaptation of the hero, though that's probably a good thing, since to most western gamers at least, *Ultraman* is a name synonymous with some truly awful fighting games. Though it's not his only appearance as a cute mascot, appearing alongside similar renditions of *Gundam* and *Kamen Rider* characters in the likes of *Battle Pinball* and the *Great Battle* series of beat-'em-ups, all of which are passable games, though none ever came to the west, nor are they particularly big names on the import scene. Was it an existing, half-finished game that Ultraman just happened to get pasted into to sell a few more copies or a genuine attempt to take the character in a new direction? We may never know…



## IN DEPTH




### FAMOUS MONSTERS
■ As is typical of an *Ultraman* game, the enemies and bosses you come up against in *Ultraman Ball* are all foes he's faced in TV shows, like the sad-looking Pigmon seen here.

### DOWNHILL JAM
■ The stages are littered with ramps, hills, slopes and sometimes even half-pipes, to enable the ball form of Ultraman to roll, bounce and just generally get about the place at high velocities.

### PROTECTIVE BUBBLE
■ Though harder to control than just travelling by foot, Ultraman's ball form offers protection as well as speed, being impervious to most of the game's obstacles.

### FULL OF LIFE
■ Though it doesn't fit in with the giant monster 'realism' of *Ultraman*, *Ultraman Ball* attempts to be as cute as possible, right down to the little faces on the flowers in the background.

## IF YOU LIKE THIS TRY…



### SONIC THE HEDGEHOG
MEGA DRIVE

■ When it comes to platform games that involve becoming a ball and moving at high speeds, Sega's blue hedgehog is obviously the progenitor and monolithic kingpin of the concept. Though *Ultraman Ball* never feels like a cheap knock-off of *Sonic* like so many other games do, it clearly owes the blue blur a lot.



### UMIHARA KAWASE
SNES

■ It might be hard to see the link between these two games at first, but they're both platformers with fairly unusual methods of getting about. They both also rely on momentum and precision. Finally, they're both games that give you a simple toolset and put you in stages designed to test your use of it to the max.



### BATTLE PINBALL
SNES

■ If you just want more *Ultraman*-themed spherical action, this pinball game has a table themed entirely around helping the silver giant protect the earth and defeat an array of giant monsters. It also has other tables themed around other iconic Japanese TV shows, too, such as *Kamen Rider* and the *Gundam* anime series.

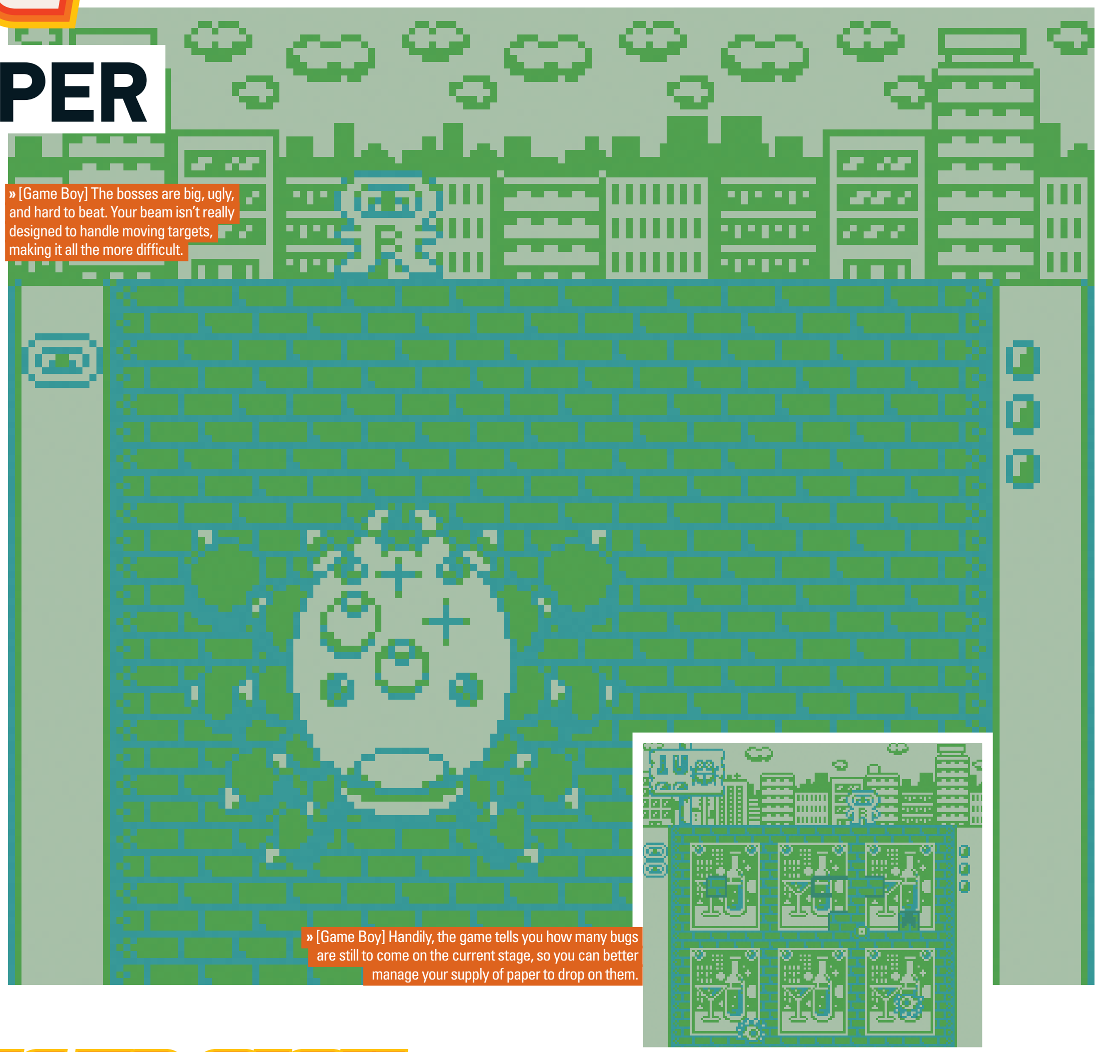
# Minority Report

## BURNING PAPER

■ DEVELOPER: PIXEL ■ YEAR: 1993

■ A strange hybrid of puzzle game and shooter, *Burning Paper* is about, well, burning paper. You play the part of a sentient magnifying glass, and are tasked with stopping bugs, rats and other such vermin from climbing a wall, with the power of focused sunlight. The catch is that direct attacks only slow the enemies down, but luckily, the wall has an array of posters nailed to it so you burn off chunks of the posters which fall down and take out any bugs they hit along the way. Obviously, you have to make sure you don't burn away all of the posters before the stage ends, and as you progress, you encounter smarter enemies. While the bugs you face on the first stage will simply climb straight upwards, making themselves easy targets, you quickly find yourself up against mice that meander all over the wall, forcing you to either predict their movements, or burn off wider chunks of paper to make sure you hit them. While doing all this, the enemies are also shooting at you, so you've got to simultaneously concentrate on paper management, aiming and staying alive. There are boss fights too, though these eschew the posters seen in the rest of the game, having the player merely trying to get in direct hits while also avoiding the boss's enthusiastic attacks.

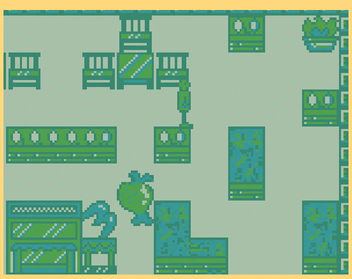
Also of note are the attractive graphics. Bravely, on a system that only offers four shades, the developers have chosen to make only very sparse use of the darkest, lending a very soft and cuddly feel to the proceedings, while at the same time, allowing the game to stand out with its own visual identity.



» [Game Boy] The bosses are big, ugly, and hard to beat. Your beam isn't really designed to handle moving targets, making it all the more difficult.

» [Game Boy] Handily, the game tells you how many bugs are still to come on the current stage, so you can better manage your supply of paper to drop on them.

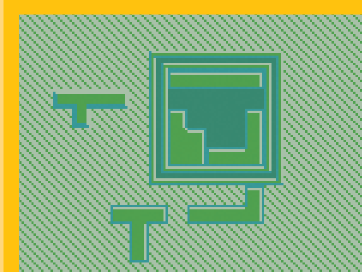
## MORE GAMES TO PLAY



### » CRAZY BURGER

■ DEVELOPER: SACHEN
■ YEAR: 1991

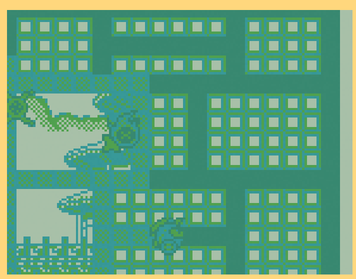
■ A bizarre little maze game about a odd-looking stick man tasked with finding packages and bringing them to be burned in a fire. Trying to stop him are giant sentient junk food items (with a knock-off McDonalds as their home base) that make him fatter and slower until he dies of a heart attack. He can't defend himself, but he can eat fruit and lift weights to slim down. Its an odd game, but also a strangely compelling one.



### » DAEDALIAN OPUS

■ DEVELOPER: VIC TOKAI
■ YEAR: 1990

■ Despite the dramatic title, it's just a very simple (but deceptively hard) puzzle game, in which the player is tasked with fitting *Tetris*-esque pieces into rectangles by picking them up, turning them and putting them in the right place. After each stage, you're given another new piece, though not all the solutions use every piece you have. There's also a completely irrelevant plot about scientists, UFOs and fairies.



### » 2ND SPACE

■ DEVELOPER: SACHEN
■ YEAR: 1993

■ If you've ever played *Amidar*, *Zoom* or *Oh Mummy*, you'll be in familiar territory here. It's a maze game, and the player just has to surround every box on each stage while avoiding the enemies and their attacks. It doesn't really add anything more to the formula, except a time-stop power-up, and pretty pictures being gradually revealed as the boxes get surrounded. That doesn't make it a bad game, though, just an unremarkable one.



### » GODZILLA-KUN

■ DEVELOPER: COMPILE
■ YEAR: 1990

■ While most of Godzilla's forays into the world of videogames are fighting or strategy games, this one has him wearing a letterman jacket and smashing boulders with his fists in a cute puzzle platformer. It's a totally bizarre combination all round, really. There's not really anything to attract giant monster fans (unless they really need every *Godzilla* game), but if you like puzzle platformers, it might be of interest.



» [Game Boy] Some stages require precision jumping while others want you to know exactly which blocks to smash. Obviously, this is one of the latter ones.

# DRAGON TAIL

■ DEVELOPER: DATA EAST ■ YEAR: 1990

■ Also known by the less exciting, though more descriptive title of *Nail N' Scale*, *Dragon Tail* is a platform game about throwing nails into blocks.This then allows for two things to happen: the nail stuck in the block can be used as a temporary platform, and in most cases, as a kind of chisel, destroying the block it's stuck in after being jumped on twice. Obviously, the game revolves around using these abilities to reach an exit door in various stages, while avoiding (or throwing nails at) the enemies patrolling the area. Graphically, *Dragon Tail* is like most other early Game Boy titles: small yet expressive sprites, everything clearly designed to fit into identically sized squares, and so on, but aside from the main gimmick, there is a nice little touch that adds a lot of charm to the game, in that your character really is throwing the nails, as opposed to just shooting them. That is to say, nails thrown horizontally will gradually fall as they travel, and nails thrown straight up will only go a short way before coming back down again. It has only the tiniest effect on gameplay (though we would hope that there are stages later in the game that require master of even this small mechanic to get through), but it makes it feel a little more real and whole.

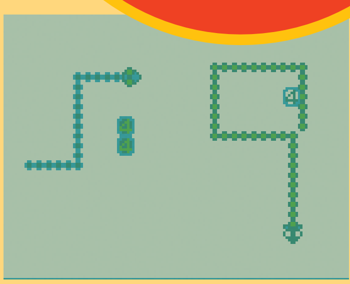
**"Aside from the main gimmick, there is a nice little touch that adds a lot of charm to the game"**

## RETRO STINKER

**»TASMANIA STORY**

■ DEVELOPER: FCI ■ YEAR: 1991

■ An awful single-screen platform game with samey levels and unfair enemies. It's ugly, it's no fun to play, and it's based on a movie nobody's ever heard of. Stay far away from this garbage.



## » SERPENT

■ DEVELOPER: NAXAT SOFT
■ YEAR: 1990

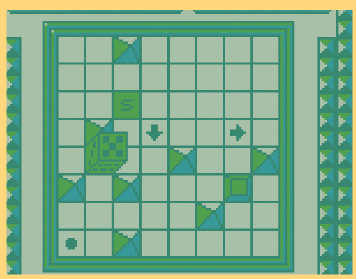
■ This is a great game themed around a war between two armies of giant robot snakes. The war takes the form of one-on-one battles in which the snakes (which are always moving forwards, and can only turn at 90 degree angles) must either surround their opponent, or trap their head in place for a few seconds until it bursts. There's also power-ups that change the length of the snakes and missiles that change the opponent's speed.



## » CHIKYUU KAIHOU GUN ZAS

■ DEVELOPER: T&E SOFT
■ YEAR: 1992

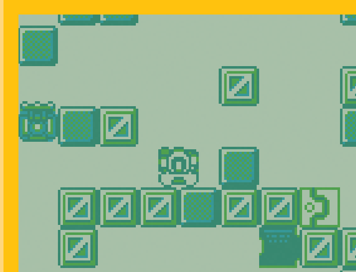
■ A nice-looking, yet unremarkable shooter, the backgrounds are some of the most detailed and well-drawn on the system, but the action just boils down to simple formations of enemies flying in to be shot down – and those backgrounds sometimes obscure the enemies, too. It's not bad but it's too simple to stand up to better-known Game Boy shooters.



## » KORO DICE

■ DEVELOPER: A-WAVE
■ YEAR: 1990

■ A grid-based puzzle game in which you have to get a die onto a square in the corner of the screen, and it is worth mentioning that the die has to land on a one to get on that square. It's a unique concept, and we're surprised no-one's done anything similar since. The downside is rolling around the screen, trying to get the die on the right face to finish the stage, which feels more like a nuisance and less like a clever puzzle.



## » BATTLE BULL

■ DEVELOPER: JORUDAN
■ YEAR: 1990

■ A more complex variation on the old *Pengo*-style block-pushing game. Each stage has you destroying a quota of enemies by crushing them with blocks, and earning money to buy better equipment (even weapons, which seems like cheating) for your tank/bulldozer hybrid vehicle. It's a simple game, but the way it makes a puzzle game into an action game with just a little tweaking is clever and it's a lot of fun to play, most importantly.

# Hardware Heaven




## ESSENTIAL GAME



### T-Zer0

Paradoxically, given that a souped-up Amiga 1200 is needed to run it, *T-Zer0* is a decidedly retro shooter. So much so that a stripped-back A500 version could have been developed. But that would be missing the point; *T-Zer0* is a celebration of what the A1200 can do when pushed. The game shifts countless alien hordes around without slow-down against high-res animated backdrops to the techno beat of a CD-quality soundtrack. *T-Zer0* teases beautiful Giger-esque scenery out of the A1200's AGA hardware, parts of which prove deadly if collided with. But as with the game's other stiff challenges, this doesn't discourage repeated play.




## Hardware fact

■ As well as having all the A500's ports, the A1200 boasts two expansion slots, an ATA interface and a 'clock port', as a result of this, countless hardware upgrades were produced for the machine.

**RAM:** 2MB
**PROCESSOR:** MOTOROLA 68EC020 (14 MHZ)
**OPERATING SYSTEM:** AMIGAOS 3.0 / 3.1
**FORMAT:** FLOPPY DISK, CD-ROM, HARD DRIVE
**TOTAL SOLD:** 840,000 (EST.)

# Amiga 1200

» **MANUFACTURER:** Commodore » **YEAR:** October 1992
» **COST:** £399 (UK launch) £175+ (UK today)

Although the least powerful of Commodore's 32-bit Amigas, the consumer-focused A1200 was a better seller than any of the firm's business-oriented A4000 systems. But the attraction of 16-bit consoles, the ascension of the PC and Commodore's bankruptcy in 1994 ultimately meant that the Amiga 1200 failed to repeat the success story of its all-conquering predecessor the Amiga 500.

That's not to say that the A1200 didn't find favour with gamers or that it wasn't well-supported by games developers. In fact, a steady supply of A1200 titles were released by the big names in Amiga gaming with many of the system's best titles arriving years after the fall of Commodore. By this point, a plethora of third-party expansions and peripherals had allowed Amiga 1200 owners to upgrade their systems far beyond their original capabilities with the result that the 32-bit Amiga line received several impressive exclusives. These exclusives may have only formed a small part of the A1200's games library, but in taking full advantage of the system's superior AGA graphics and designing to the strengths of upgraded machines, developers showed those that had invested in the Amiga 1200 what might have been had events played out differently. *

HORROR SPECIAL

# FRIDAY THE 13TH

## THE CREATORS OF DOMARK'S FRIDAY THE 13TH GAME JOIN MARTYN CARROLL AROUND THE CAMPFIRE TO REVEAL HOW THEY BROUGHT MANIACAL KILLER JASON VOORHEES TO LIFE ON 8-BIT COMPUTERS

**In the Eighties the *Friday The 13th* series was as unstoppable as its star, Jason. The movie was released in 1980 and made $60 million at the worldwide** box office; an incredible result for a *Halloween*-inspired slasher that cost half a million dollars to produce. A franchise was born and seven sequels and a spin-off TV series followed before the decade was out. Away from the screen the series spawned products including novels, comics, toys and clothing.

*A Friday The 13th* videogame was as inevitable as the Jason lunch box. With so many titles flooding onto the market in the Eighties it obviously helped if your game was based on a recognised property. It helped even more if that property courted a little controversy. They may seem tame by today's standards but the *F13* movies were viewed by many as repellent little exploitation flicks. In the UK the BBFC censored gory scenes from the third, fourth and fifth films before they were granted an '18' age rating for home video release. Of course interactive titles weren't required to be rated at the time so a *F13* game that could be bought by kids was likely to provoke a reaction.

It was Domark Software that chose to court that controversy when it acquired the licence in 1985. The UK firm had only formed the previous year but was already known for its marketing and promotional nous. It had already scored a hit with a poor game based on the *Bond* movie *A View To A Kill* so it knew all about






» [C64] Each character has their own 'personality rating', but it has very little bearing on the game.

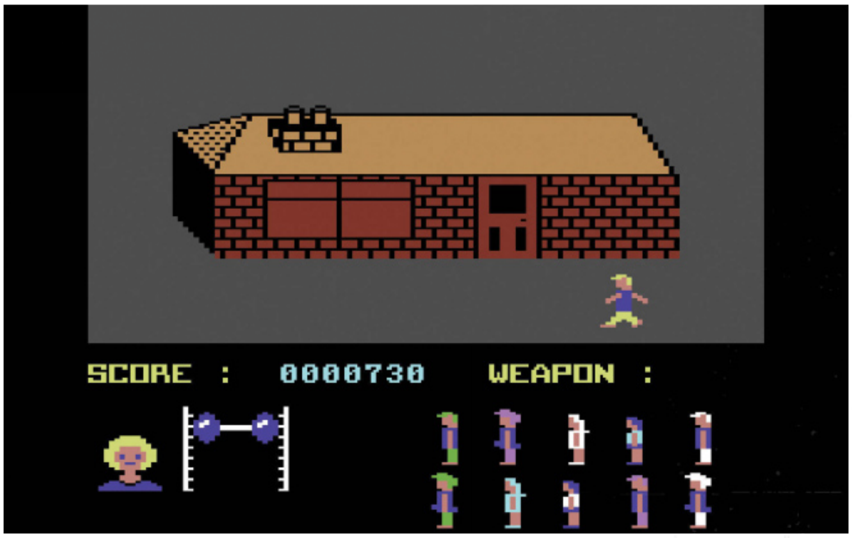
the value that lay in a strong licence. *A Friday The 13th* game was a good fit for Domark, but the developer it chose to develop the game was a surprise.

ASK (Applied Systems Knowledge) was a software house set up to produce educational titles. ASK programmer Brian White explains, "It was founded by a small group of teachers who saw the growing market for home computers as an opportunity to help with children's education. In 1985 Domark approached ASK with the proposal to develop a game based around the *Friday The 13th* films. I was at the point of having just finished a project and was about to start the next so I got the assignment."

**Why ASK, though? "All of us wondered about that but we never did get an answer, at** least not that I heard," says Brian. "The developers among us always thought that Domark probably approached some other companies who were more game-centric but they may have turned it down due to either existing project commitments or possibly the rather tight schedule Domark insisted upon."

Domark announced that it had acquired the licence from Paramount Pictures in October 1985 – the same month that the fifth film, *A New Beginning*, hit UK cinemas – and planned to have the game out in time for Christmas. This gave ASK just eight weeks of development time. Despite ASK's scholarly background the team was at least familiar with the series. "Most of us working on the project had seen at least one of the films," says Brian. "A few of us used to have a movie night in the office after work. We watched all the previous films and I know they were supposed to be horror films but we just couldn't stop laughing at everything. We used to play games to guess who would die next. The losers had to make the coffees and do the sandwich run the next day."

Caffeine and sustenance was vital as the team cracked on with the development, fully aware of Domark's optimistic schedule. To add further pressure ASK was tasked with producing the lead Commodore 64 version and also the Amstrad CPC and ZX Spectrum ports. Brian says, "Most of the development staff were involved in the initial concept meeting where we laid the foundation for the design. Tony Bickley managed the project and I was the main developer but others did contribute to the graphics and the map layout. The ▶




» [C64] The main building, clearly based on the cabin from the original *Friday The 13th* movie.

**"We watched all the [Friday the 13th] films… and just couldn't stop laughing at everything"**
Brian White



### FRIDAY THE 13TH 101

■ Playing as one of ten carefree campers, you have to locate and defeat crazed killer Jason Voorhees before he hacks your friends to pieces. The game map features three buildings – a cabin, a barn and a church – where you can take refuge, although over time Jason will stalk and kill everyone if you don't find him first.



### IN THE KNOW

- » **PUBLISHER:** Domark
- » **DEVELOPER:** ASK
- » **RELEASED:** 1985
- » **PLATFORM:** C64, CPC, Spectrum
- » **PLATFORM:** Arcade adventure

## JASON VS NINTENDO

**Like Jason, the game returned… but this time on the NES**

**Jason never stays down for long and he returned to stalk fresh victims on the NES in 1989. The game was a typical 2D side-scrolling affair, with players being able to jump and duck and fire weapons at enemies (that included shuffling zombies for some strange reason – yes, this was a fairly loose tie-in). The main objective was to save young campers from Jason's axe. As you explored the camp you'd be alerted that Jason was inside one of the cabins and you had to rush there and fend him off. In a neat touch this was the super zombie Jason from the later films and he cut an imposing figure. The setting was well realised and you could explore the woods and caves around the camp and even row a boat on the lake. As this was a Nintendo game it was strictly PG-13 with not a drop of the red stuff on show.**



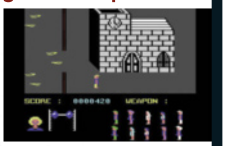

» [NES] The Nintendo version of *Friday The 13th* was a much more tame affair with no gore to be seen.





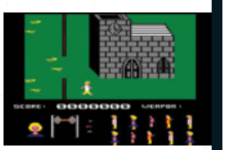

# GOOD FRIDAY?

### How the three versions of the game compare



## COMMODORE 64

■ The graphics for the lead version look more Atari 2600 that C64, but at least movement is fast. The soundtrack features bizarre 'stock' music, with song choices ranging from the sublime ('*Teddy Bears' Picnic*' when you're in the woods) to the ridiculous ('*Robin Hood*' when you visit the archery range).



## AMSTRAD CPC

■ The CPC version is very close to the C64 original, with the same map, graphics and music. The screams are included, as is the memorable 'machete in the head' screen. The use of colour is slightly better, with the green outdoor backgrounds being preferable to the grey seen on the C64.



## SPECTRUM

■ What did the Speccy do to deserve this? There's no sound whatsoever (not even footsteps), no gore and, worst of all, you can only attack to your right (flipping the weapon graphics was clearly too much hassle). It's still playable, but poor presentation makes it the worst of the three versions.




» [C64] Jason claims another victim in his rural domain.



» Domark founders Dominic Wheatley and Mark Strachan wishing everybody a bloody good Christmas.

primary requirement from Domark was that it wanted a game based on the films, even if only loosely. The main change we made was to make Jason one of the other 'guests' at the camp who no-one would recognise until he was trying to kill you."

While the game didn't follow the typical *Friday The 13th* plot, it did tie-in with the story of the newly-released fifth film where Jason was dead (for real), and a shadowy copycat killer was responsible for yet another bloodbath. So like the film the game was a whodunit, with players taking control of a camper and having to work out which of the nine other campers was the killer. Sometimes you'd see 'Jason' openly attack another camper and you could intervene using one of the many weapons left lying around the camp. Most times, though, the killings would take place off-screen and would be signalled by an ear-splitting scream followed by a 'horror' screen – one of which showed a poor chap with a bloody machete wedged in his head. "The thought that it might be a bit too much probably never entered my head," says Brian. "Some of the people who worked at ASK were conscious of that sort of thing and if they thought it was going too far they would have said. The gory picture and the screams were just an attempt to surprise players rather than scare them."




» Not the usual festive cover from *Crash*. This Oli Frey art generated a number of angry letters.

**In addition to 'unmasking' Jason and killing him (at which point the game** would simply begin again a different character), you could also try and protect fellow campers by creating a sanctuary in one of the buildings where Jason would dare not tread. This neat idea wasn't implemented too well however, mainly due to the time constraints the team was under. Other areas also had to be curtailed. "I remember that the map was going to be bigger – about twice the width and height," reveals Brian. "There was something about having to find clues to Jason's identity too."

Project manager Tony Bickley remembers the compromises that had to be made. "There was a plot that unfolded as the game progressed and there was also a set of progressive difficulty levels. Both were cut during the crunch period. Basically, the old story – more time equals more polish. I was not proud of the game as it went out. It needed an additional six to eight weeks."

ASK stuck to the schedule and the game made it out in time for Christmas, at which point the Domark marketing machine kicked into overdrive. For the launch the gaming press was invited to the cellar of London's famous Ye Olde Cheshire Cheese pub where Domark co-founder Dominic Wheatley leapt out of the shadows wearing a hockey mask and brandishing a plastic meat cleaver. The game came with gimmicks too – a horror sound effects competition and some joke shop blood capsules were included in the pack. The inlay even warned, "This package contains material which may disturb people of a nervous disposition." However it was the main cover image that caused the most controversy. It depicted Jason's hockey mask lying in a pool of blood and with a knife thrust through one of the eye holes. Magazines that ran the advert featuring the image received complaints from readers and one of the main high street chains, John Menzies, refused to stock the game due to the cover – a decision that was reported in newspapers with a 'violent videogames' slant.



» The pack included some fake blood capsules. Just because really.








## "I was not proud of the game as it went out. It needed an additional six to eight weeks"

Tony Bickley

The game needed all the free publicity it could get because the reviews that followed were far from kind. *Popular Computing Weekly* was the first to review it in December 1985, saying that "Clever marketing won't disguise the fact that this is a poor game." *Zzap!64* awarded it 13%, a score that was presumably ironic but the savage reviewer comments suggested otherwise. *Crash* called it "Absolutely awful". The only positive review came from *C&VG* who awarded it 7/10, but later backtracked by referring to it as, "The sorriest release of 1985." Brian believes that the poor reception was largely justified: "I remember one review where the reviewer made about four or five points like 'You can't even do this…' and 'It doesn't even have that…' and most of them were things in our original design. That was a very depressing review."

**Despite Domark's best efforts the bad reviews sealed the game's fate. Tony says: "As a game it wasn't** particularly successful; too much was left unpolished. As a commercial project for ASK it paid the bills but did us no real favours as a portfolio piece. For Domark I think it was a failure." The game failed to make it onto any of the sales charts and was dead on arrival. Unlike the film series there would be no sequels. "If Domark had offered us a sequel I would have accepted the challenge," admits Brian, "but only if we were allowed a schedule in which to develop something more to our liking. The main changes I would have implemented were our original designs. I would have also gone back to the reviews for further inspiration."

ASK returned to educational software and both Brian and Tony remain in the industry to this day. Domark improved its image and enjoyed success with home conversions of Atari coin-ops on the way to becoming one of the UK's biggest publishers in the Nineties. Against all odds the *Friday The 13th* game exhibited small signs of life, being resurrected on the budget Bug-Byte label in 1988. For a couple of quid it was easier to forgive the game's failings and enjoy it as a time waster. If you ignored the objectives you'd discover a sandbox title in which you could explore and scavenge and even grab a weapon and become Jason if you wanted – and that was surely how many people played the game.

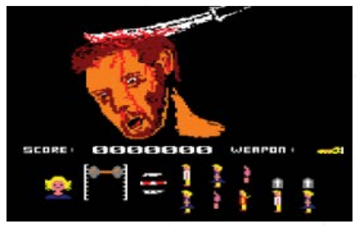
The game's standing has improved over time and now on the Lemon64 website the C64 version has a reader rating of 6.7 out of 10, placing it between 'above average' and 'good'. A couple of fans have even created an updated version called *Sunday The 15th* that features gameplay tweaks and bug fixes. Brian is delighted to hear about the game's appeal. "There must have been something they enjoyed about the game when they were younger that made it worth remembering. We wanted to produce something that people would enjoy playing, so I'm just glad we made the players happy, if not the critics." *




» [C64] By placing the cross in a building you could command your friends to shelter there, out of Jason's way.

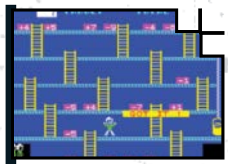



» [C64] An unmasked Jason chases you through the cabin, seeking blood. Uhoh!




» [C64] The 'gore' screen that appears when the bodies start piling up.



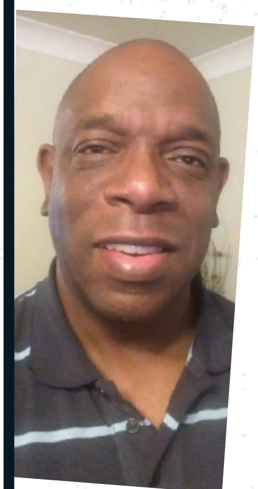


### DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

**TIME TRUCKER**
**SYSTEM:** C64, BBC Micro
**YEAR:** 1984

**NUMBER PAINTER (PICTURED)**
**SYSTEM:** ZX Spectrum
**YEAR:** 1984

**PAZAZZ**
**SYSTEM:** C64
**YEAR:** 1986



» Brian White, the game's lead designer and programmer.

## DIGITAL HORROR

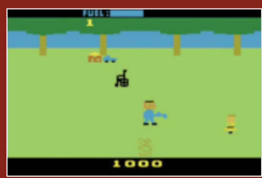
More slasher film videogame adaptions



### HALLOWEEN

**FORMAT:** Atari 2600
**YEAR:** 1983

■ Produced by B-movie legend Charles Band, this simple take on John Carpenter's horror classic was reasonably entertaining. Playing as babysitter Laurie Strode you had to lead the kids in the house to safety. If you were 'got' by Michael Myers your headless body ran off the screen, spurting red pixels!




### THE TEXAS CHAINSAW MASSACRE

**FORMAT:** Atari 2600 **YEAR:** 1983

■ Forming a gruesome twosome with Halloween, the second horror cart from Charles Band had no redeeming features. You did get the dubious honour of playing as Leatherface, but running around sawing people up while avoiding the scenery was far too tedious.



### A NIGHTMARE ON ELM STREET

**FORMAT:** C64/PC **YEAR:** 1989

■ An early effort from Westwood Studios, based on the third *Elm Street* movie. You had to first find Freddy's house in a maze of streets, then seek out your friends and try and defeat Kruger with your special dream powers. Not as immediate as Rare's NES *Elm Street* game but overall a better tie-in.



### PSYCHO

**FORMAT:** C64/Amiga/ST/PC
**YEAR:** 1989

■ The film that started the slasher genre was reimagined as an adventure game almost 30 years later. You played a detective tasked with visiting the Bates Motel and accompanying house on the hill in search of missing jewels – while avoiding 'Mother'. Interesting and odd in equal measures.



### THE DARK HALF

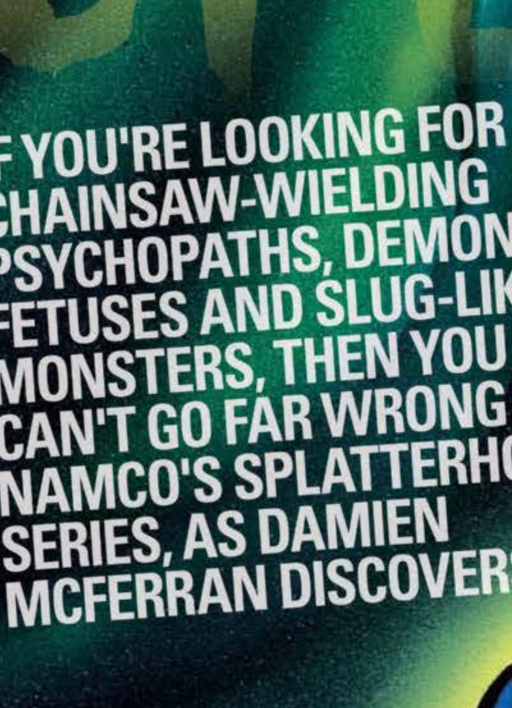
**FORMAT:** PC **YEAR:** 1992

■ Based on the George Romero movie which in turn was based on the Stephen King novel. That horror pedigree didn't result in a very good game sadly, although it's not as awful as many it make out to be. Devoted fans of point-and-click adventures would have some fun trying to stop the deranged killer George Stark.

HORROR SPECIAL

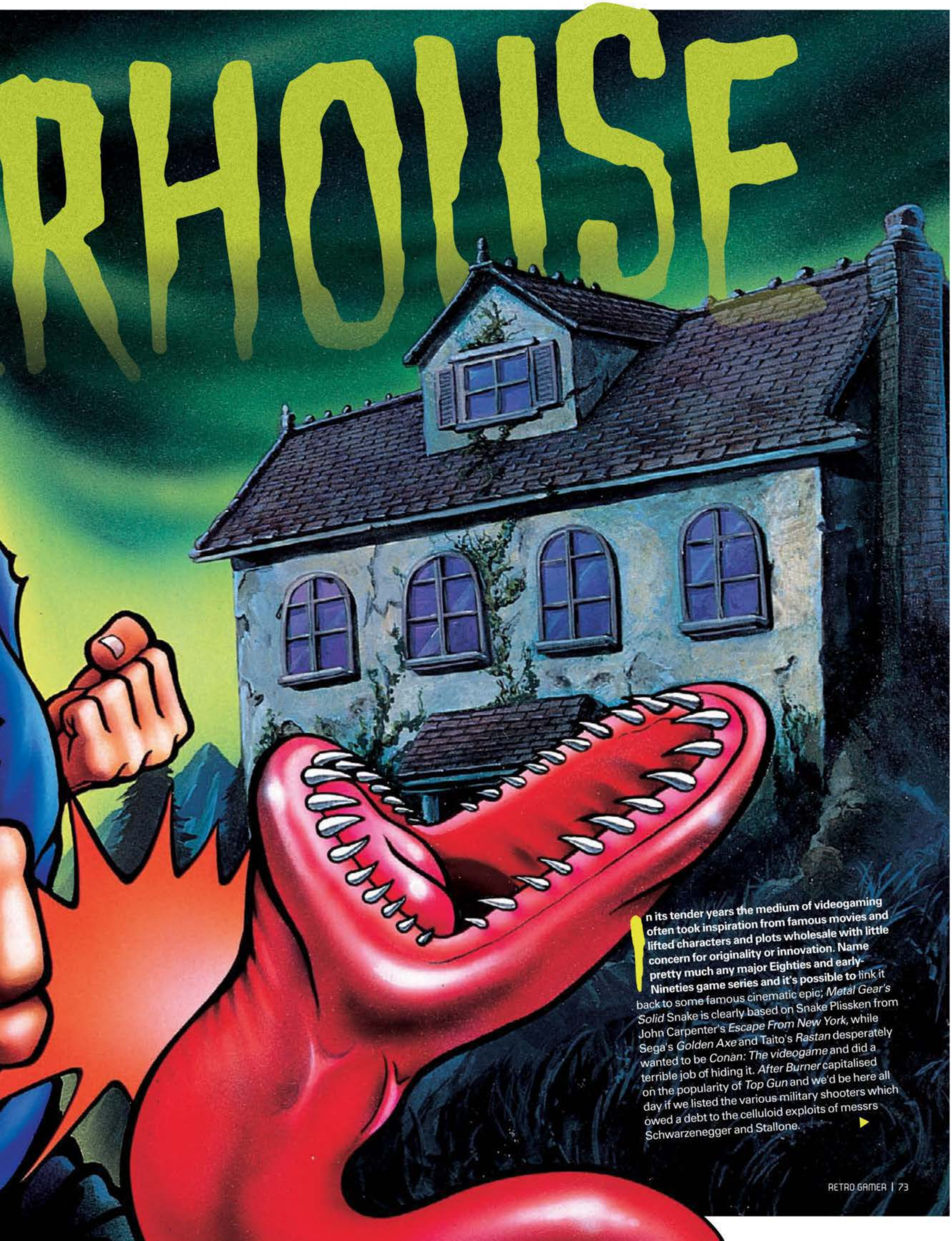
# SPLATTE

**IF YOU'RE LOOKING FOR CHAINSAW-WIELDING PSYCHOPATHS, DEMONIC FETUSES AND SLUG-LIKE MONSTERS, THEN YOU CAN'T GO FAR WRONG WITH NAMCO'S SPLATTERHOUSE SERIES, AS DAMIEN MCFERRAN DISCOVERS**




» [PC Engine] Despite the limitations of the hardware, the PC Engine/TurboGrafx-16 port is incredibly faithful to the arcade.





# RHOUSE

**In its tender years the medium of videogaming often took inspiration from famous movies and lifted characters and plots wholesale with little concern for originality or innovation. Name pretty much any major Eighties and early-Nineties game series and it's possible to** link it back to some famous cinematic epic; *Metal Gear's* Solid Snake is clearly based on Snake Plissken from John Carpenter's *Escape From New York*, while Sega's *Golden Axe* and Taito's *Rastan* desperately wanted to be *Conan: The videogame* and did a terrible job of hiding it. *After Burner* capitalised on the popularity of *Top Gun* and we'd be here all day if we listed the various military shooters which owed a debt to the celluloid exploits of messrs Schwarzenegger and Stallone. ▶




» [PC Engine] Not all of the enemies you face in *Splatterhouse* are disgusting – one boss is made up of flying household objects.

HORROR SPECIAL

# MAIN CHARACTERS

**Your guide to Splatterhouse's heroes and villains**

### RICK TAYLOR



■ Rick's a pretty typical guy with a gorgeous girlfriend and a promising life ahead of him, but when Jennifer goes missing inside West Mansion he dons the Terror Mask and becomes a powerful monster, intent on revenge.

### JENNIFER WILLIS



■ Rick's childhood sweetheart. She goes missing in the first *Splatterhouse* title and Rick is forced to kill her at its conclusion. She returns in future instalments, and eventually Rick and Jennifer have a son named David.

### TERROR MASK



■ The mysterious mask which grants Rick his powers. A relic owned by Dr West, the Terror Mask guides Rick through each adventure and gains a wicked sense of humour in the 2010 reboot. Its motives are mysterious.

### DR HENRY WEST

■ The deranged genius who owns West Mansion, Henry West gets his kicks by torturing people and undertaking twisted, evil experiments. In the 2010 reboot it is revealed that he is immortal and over 200 years old.



**There's one running theme with all this cheeky plagiarism: the main character was always heroic, dependable and was nevertheless the kind of selfless individual who would stop to stroke a kitten or assist an old lady in crossing the road. Going** against this tried-and-tested template is what made Namco's *Splatterhouse* such a revelation when it appeared in arcades all over the globe in 1988. Here was a game which allowed you to experience exactly what it felt like to be an unhinged killing machine akin to *Friday The 13th*'s Jason Voorhees.

Not that *Splatterhouse* protagonist Rick Taylor starts out *all* bad. Prior to the events of the game he's your typical college kid escaping harsh weather with his girlfriend Jennifer by foolishly diving into the mysterious West Mansion – the titular 'Splatter House', so named because of grisly experiments conducted by owner Dr West. Upon entering the building Jennifer is immediately whisked away and Rick falls unconscious, only to awaken in a dungeon with a demonic, sentient mask stuck to his face. The 'Terror Mask' makes an offer Rick is in no position to refuse; it will imbue him with superhuman strength and grant him the means to rescue his beloved. As far as set-ups go, it was an intriguing premise and one which stood out amid the 'generic good guy versus the world' stories which were seen in games of the time.

This simple change to the standard hero template made *Splatterhouse* a coin-op hit, and combined with the incredibly gory and graphic visuals ensured that Namco's title consumed a steady stream of spare change no matter where it was installed. The mere notion of controlling a hockey-masked monster was so different to what had gone before that players couldn't help but try it out, and when they did the straightforward but challenging gameplay invariably made them stick around for the long haul. *Splatterhouse* was, even by standards of the time, a basic scrolling action title. Unlike beat-'em-ups of the period such as *Double Dragon* and *Renegade*, it didn't allow for full three-dimensional movement and instead locked the player to a horizontal plane. Rick could punch, kick and jump, as well as pick up various weapons which had context-sensitive attack animations. For example, smashing a certain kind of enemy with a wooden stick would result in them being hurled against the wall in a explosion of guts and viscera, while attacking the same creature with a meat cleaver would slice them in two. In those tender and innocent years before *Mortal Kombat* caused such a furore among concerned parents, *Splatterhouse* was arguably one of the most shockingly violent videogames ever created.

» This short comic advertisement accompanied the US launch of the game on the TurboGrafx-16.




It wasn't just the bloodthirsty exploits portrayed in *Friday The 13th* that inspired the on-screen action in *Splatterhouse* – the deformed denizens located in West Mansion's grim and foreboding halls could have been taken straight out of the *Evil Dead* series, or one of the many nightmarish horror movies of the period. Perhaps the most memorable – and shocking – were the infected fetuses which hung from ropes in the bowels of West Mansion and usually contained parasitic boreworms which leapt out and attacked Rick. Later in the game you encountered the iconic Biggy Man, a boss character with chainsaws for hands and a sack on his head. When the enemies weren't giving you nightmares the mansion itself delivered some equally disturbing spectacles; the opening dungeon stage was packed with Dr West's other victims, cruelly locked away in cages begging for someone to put them out of their misery.

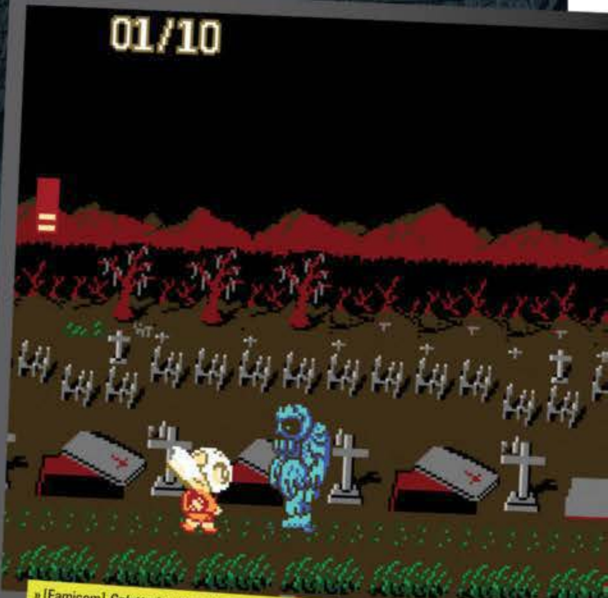




» Caitlin Oliver is the world record holder on the arcade *Splatterhouse*.

**Despite *Splatterhouse*'s run in arcades it didn't receive as many domestic ports as you might expect. The PC Engine/TurboGrafx-16 conversion is perhaps the** most famous, a direct result of Namco's close relationship with NEC at the time. The FM Towns port is more faithful, offering a direct conversion of the arcade original, but it's the TurboGrafx edition which has had the most impact with Western players. "The first time I saw a copy of *Splatterhouse* was shortly after my father purchased a TurboGrafx-16 for me as a Christmas present," says *Splatterhouse* arcade world record holder Caitlin Oliver. "Every weekend, he would take me to the video store and let me rent a game or two. And in the late-Eighties and early-Nineties the only way you could decide what to rent was box art and – if you were lucky – a few screenshots on the back of the package. I grew up with an affinity for horror movies and spooky monsters, so the cover of *Splatterhouse* caught my eye. I took it home that day and fell in love." While the Japanese version of the PC Engine port was authentic enough some elements were deemed too extreme for North American players. "Several changes were made to the game," says Caitlin. "The colour of the mask was swapped to a purple-red tone and religious icons were removed, but those were the most major changes, aside from working within hardware limitations. For a game released in 1990, it was an outstanding port."

*Splatterhouse* might not seem like the most likely candidate for high score fame but Caitlin rose to the challenge and is now the undisputed master of Namco's gore-drenched classic. "I went to the arcade by myself on a Saturday night since I didn't have anything else to do, pulled up a stool and decided to play some *Splatterhouse*," she remembers. "I specifically went to Galloping Ghost Arcade because the first time I went there was the first time I had seen a *Splatterhouse* cabinet in my entire life. One of the employees, Chris, seemed surprised that I was there alone to play a beat-'em-up and asked me if I was going for a record. At the time, I just said, "No, I'm not that good," and wrote it off, but it stuck with me, especially having seen *King Of Kong* years prior to that. I couldn't stop thinking about it. I thought it would take me months




» [Famicom] *Splatterhouse: Wanpaku Graffiti* was a parody of the arcade original with cute visuals.

# SILVER SCREEN INFLUENCES

**The numerous horror films that helped inspire Splatterhouse**



## TEXAS CHAINSAW MASSACRE 1974

■ Fisherman operating around the area have reported hearing odd sounds in the woods, including shotgun blasts as well as the buzzing of chainsaws. While we're sure hunting and logging are likely to be the source, an eyewitness has been touting that Leatherface has set up residence in the woodland.



## FRIDAY THE 13TH 1980

■ Locals have expressed concern at sightings of a male harassing wildlife in the woods. He is understood to have attacked dogs with a shotgun and disturbed aquatic life near the river. One eyewitness compared the individual to one Jason Voorhees, another somewhat unhinged individual with a proclivity for wearing masks and causing dissent among the populace.

## POLTERGEIST 1982

■ We've received news of strange paranormal activity at the West Mansion, including eyewitness reports that chairs are not only spookily flying around rooms, but even going as far as attacking people, including an unnamed masked individual. We've not seen this sort of paranormal activity since the Freeling's home was attacked.





## RE-ANIMATOR 1985

■ It is rumoured that local Doctor Henry West has been able to bring recently dead individuals back to life. Although the reclusive West has yet to go public with his work, bizarre sounds have been heard emanating from his secluded mansion. We can only hope he avoids the pitfalls of his namesake Dr Herbert West, who famously reanimated corpses at Miskatonic University in New England.

## EVIL DEAD II 1987

■ A man walking his dog in the outlands near West Mansion has reported spotting mangled flesh and dissected animal corpses. The man stated that it looks as if someone had been dumping the offcuts from a local butchers, but locals with more active imaginations are comparing these grisly finds to the famous 'Ash Williams' murders.



SPOOKY HOMES

More creepy locales that you might not want to investigate



### SCARY SCHOOL
AS SEEN IN: Blinky's Scary School

■ This haunted castle is a place where ghosts learn how to be scary, and Blinky is the star pupil. His task is to clear the dusty corridors of ghost-busting traps that have been laid down by cruel spirit hunters. It's a bit like Hogwarts, but with more cobwebs.



### STAUF MANSION
AS SEEN IN: The 7th Guest

■ Built by the evil Henry Stauf and packed with devious puzzles, this eerie location served as the backdrop to one of the most famous CD-ROM titles of all time. Packed with ghosts and other unnerving sights, the mansion is described by locals as, "A strange house, a house that scared people."

### DERCETO MANOR
AS SEEN IN: Alone in the Dark

■ Located in Louisiana, Derceto Mansion is owned by Jeremy Hartwood, whose suicide triggers the events of the game. Widely reputed to be haunted, the mansion was in fact built by occultist pirate Ezechiel Pregzt, who is looking for a suitable host for his spirit.



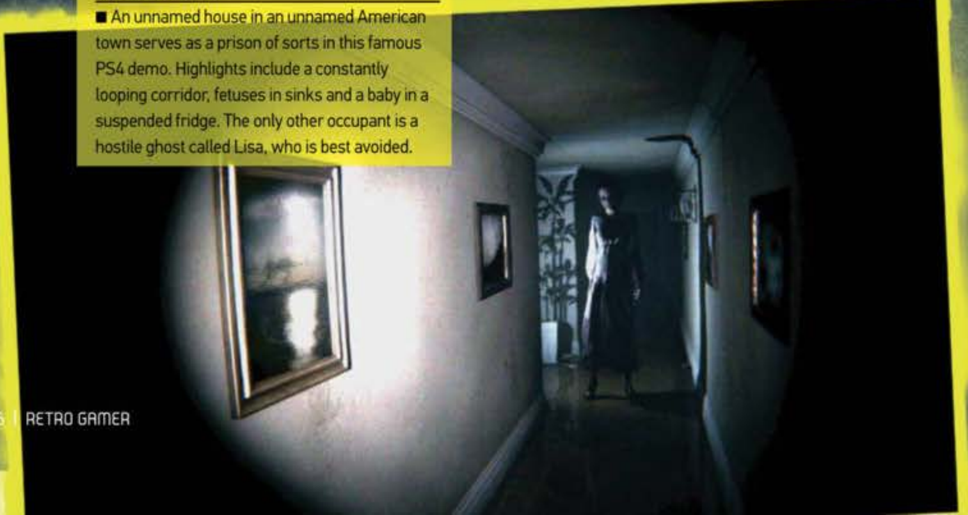


### SPENCER MANSION
AS SEEN IN: Resident Evil

■ The foreboding setting of the first *Resident Evil* title, the Spencer Mansion was conceived by Oswell E. Spencer as a cover for his inhuman experiments. Packed with zombies and other mutated monsters, it was destroyed at the conclusion of the game.

### SUBURBAN HOUSE
AS SEEN IN: PT

■ An unnamed house in an unnamed American town serves as a prison of sorts in this famous PS4 demo. Highlights include a constantly looping corridor, fetuses in sinks and a baby in a suspended fridge. The only other occupant is a hostile ghost called Lisa, who is best avoided.



to work up to a score that high, but watching the record run from Anthony Paparo helped me with my single sticking point, the level five boss. I broke the record on 19 October 2013. I set a record of 405,100. I continued to play that day and broke my own record with a score of 493,700. Since then, Anthony and I have gone back and forth with the score, and my most recent record is 638,100, which I set on 1 August 2014. Even if it gets taken down, I'm always ready to keep pushing myself further."

Caitlin explains that *Splatterhouse*'s reputation as a brute of a game is largely down to the fact that players approach it like a typical brawler, and make the mistake of pressing the enemy without first looking for openings and patterns. "Aside from a few boss attacks and level six, the entire game is a pattern and relies on waiting for the enemies to step into your attack range," she explains. "I see a lot of people pick the game up at the arcade and die before making it to the first boss simply because they're rushing enemies instead of being patient. Beyond that, the more you play the further you will get – enemy placement never changes. I think people trying to play it as you would a traditional brawler is what gives off the aura of difficulty surrounding this game – because that will *absolutely* get you killed."

**The notoriety of the arcade original meant that a sequel was a matter of 'when' rather than 'if', but Namco ignored the coin-op route and instead decided to create the next *Splatterhouse* entry on Nintendo's dominant Famicom console.** 1989's *Splatterhouse: Wanpaku Graffiti* was a very different beast to the arcade game, however. Boasting cute visuals and platforming gameplay – both elements which were no doubt adopted to ensure the game appealed to a younger audience – *Wanpaku Graffiti* dropped the gore seen in its arcade forerunner. This change – coupled with the fact that the game never saw release outside of Japan – might lead you to assume it's not worth bothering with, but in fact it's an excellent release in its own right. In the same way that Konami would create a cutting and hilarious self-parody in the form of *Parodius*, Namco's work on *Wanpaku Graffiti* showed the company was imbued with a keen sense of humour. Not only did the game poke fun at *Splatterhouse* itself, it made light of many horror flicks of the period and dropped in copious pop-culture references – the ending revealed that the entire game was a movie in itself, for example. The introduction of passwords (later re-used in *Splatterhouse* sequels), an experience point system and an alternative ending proved that Namco was willing to innovate with the first domestic *Splatterhouse* game, even if the level of gore and violence was noticeably less than fans of the original were perhaps expecting.

*Splatterhouse* would get a true sequel in 1992 on Sega's Mega Drive console. It was an unusual move given the system's shaky commercial position in its native Japan, but Namco was, at the time, trying to reduce its reliance on Nintendo's Famicom following a very public falling out between boss and founder Masaya Nakamura and Nintendo over licensing agreements for creating and publishing




» [Mega Drive] *Splatterhouse 2* boasted better visuals than the PC Engine port of the original, and gory death animations.




» [Mega Drive] *Splatterhouse 3*'s story changed based on how quickly you overcame each level.







» [Mega Drive] *Splatterhouse 3* played more like a traditional scrolling fighter, with grapple moves included.




» [Mega Drive] Jennifer is dragged into the underworld as Rick looks on, seemingly unmoved.

performance. Neither Mega Drive sequel really matched the original in terms of quality, even if they both did an admirable job of trying to make their own mark. "*Splatterhouse 2* and *Splatterhouse 3* were not games I got to play while I was growing up, as I grew up in a household without a Genesis/Mega Drive console and played only the Sega games my cousins had," says Caitlin. "However, having gone back to them as an adult, they're both good games – *Splatterhouse 2* keeping the formula going, and *Splatterhouse 3* tried something new. *Splatterhouse 3* was personally somewhat underwhelming for me, but I appreciate that they experimented with new features – even if I do hate games that put you under a time limit. They stress me out."

> "I see a lot of people pick the game up at the arcade and die before making it to the first boss"
>
> Caitlin Oliver

Famicom software, which Nakamura deemed to be monopolistic. As a result, Sega fans benefitted from a range of exclusive Namco releases, including *Rolling Thunder 2, Marvel Land, Burning Force* and more. *Splatterhouse 2* joined these ranks in 1992 and in terms of gameplay remained largely unchanged from its predecessor, with Rick's repertoire of attacks being almost identical. Visually, things took a slight hit due to the fact that Sega's hardware wasn't as adept as the arcade tech which powered the original, but a memorable soundtrack made up for things. Reviews at the time weren't kind and pointed out how similar *Splatterhouse 2* was to its forerunner; there's little in the way of innovation, although the enemy designs were more disturbing and creative.



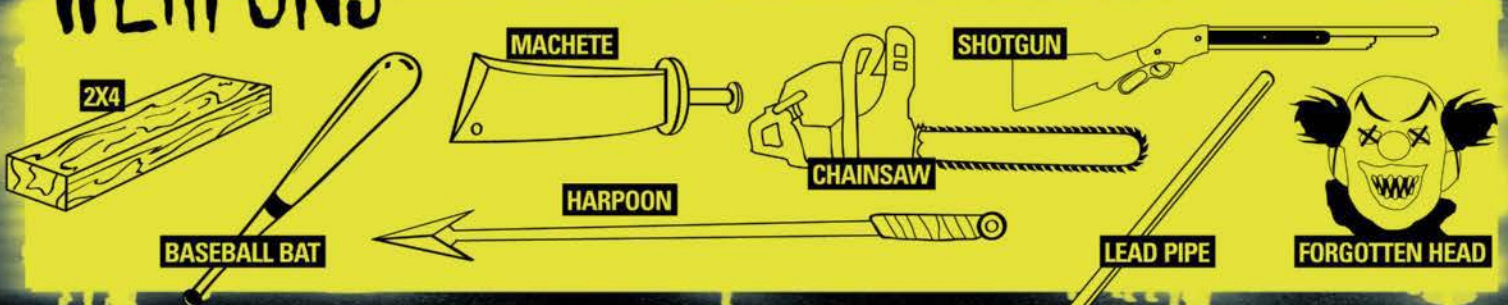

» *Splatterhouse* even got its down LCD portable game, which is incredibly rare today.

*Splatterhouse 3* followed a year later – again on the Mega Drive – and has the dubious distinction of being the first title to be classified by Sega's self-enforced Videogame Rating Council, a measure introduced to curb the negative press generated by federal hearings in the US relating to videogame violence. *Splatterhouse 3* was given an MA-13 rating for its graphic violence and gore, and did a commendable job of building on the twisted visions witnessed in previous instalments. This time around Rick and Jennifer are married and have a son called David, and Rick is a successful businessman with a vast mansion – which of course gets invaded by evil spirits, triggering the third appearance of the iconic Terror Mask. The third game broke free of its fixed plane and finally gave the player the ability to move in all directions, just like *Final Fight* and *Streets Of Rage*. This change alone gave the game a more flexible feel, making it easier for newcomers to adapt to, but this was balanced out by a non-linear progression system where you could move from room to room at will and often had to backtrack to find your goal. Another big addition was the presence of a time limit, which directly impacted the outcome of the adventure. Failure to reach the conclusion of a level in the required time had severe ramifications for Rick and his family, with one of four different endings being available depending on the player's

**The third *Splatterhouse* outing would be the last entry in the franchise for almost two decades, but a third instalment arrived on the PlayStation 3 and Xbox 360 in 2010. A 3D reboot of the arcade title which started it all, this updated edition** endured a troubled development period – but the team behind the title had its heart in the right place. "The originals were pioneers in pushing the boundaries of horror and gore in videogames, plus the gameplay was challenging enough that it had you coming back for more punishment," says Scott Holty, who served as lead game designer on the project. "When we approached this game, we wanted to capture the essence and soul of the originals while having it fit in the modern landscape of games. The elements that we really keyed on were the characters, the combat, the weapons, the bosses and of course the gore. We strove to make Rick feel badass to allow him to rip, tear and smash his way through demons. We also wanted to bring back the weapons like the 2X4, cleaver and shotgun to add to Rick's arsenal. To keep the continuity between our game and the original, we made sure that some of the iconic bosses made it into our game like Biggy Man, Mirror Rick and the Poltergeist. Finally we really wanted to make sure that the gore was over the top and pushed the boundaries of what was acceptable in a videogame much like the original games had." ▶

## WEAPONS

Shoot, saw, club and chop your way to freedom





» The *Splatterhouse* reboot was promoted at events via a life-sized and somewhat unnerving Rick statue.



» [Xbox 360] For all of its faults, the 2010 *Splatterhouse* still offers plenty of dumb fun and satisfying gore.

**While every effort was made to maintain a connection with the existing trilogy, it goes without saying that certain changes had to be actioned to ensure that the *Splatterhouse* reboot was palatable for modern audiences.**

"The things that we wanted to do to modernise *Splatterhouse* were to give this version its own look and feel while still making it fit in the franchise," Scott says. "That involved the re-imagining of the characters and artwork while still keeping it familiar to the core audience. Plus we wanted to incorporate an involved storyline and give the characters personality and depth, especially focusing on the dynamics between Rick and the Terror Mask. The Mask provided some great comedic relief to help take some of the edge off of the violent imagery."

Sadly, the game endured a development period which was every bit as nightmarish as the monsters it showcased, and much of this had to do with the relationship between Bottlerocket and publisher Namco. "*Splatterhouse* did have quite a challenging and troubled development," laments Scott. "There were irreconcilable creative differences between the top management at Bottlerocket and Namco. Things came to a head as we were progressing towards the alpha build of the game, and after a couple failed alpha submissions Namco decided it was in their best interest to pull the project. That unfortunately signalled the beginning of the end for Bottlerocket, as their other internal project had its publisher go out of business. Namco, however, still strongly believed not only in the project but in the team as well so they offered just about everyone who was on the team a job to continue working. In the end I believe 23 members ended up joining Namco and we set up a brand new studio about a block away from Bottlerocket's location that we dubbed Studio Kaizen. The 23 of us that stayed with the game were paired up with the internal Namco team that had just finished *Afro Samurai*."

As if to confirm the almost cursed nature of production, Scott recalls an anecdote which could also have been part of the game's gruesome plot. "We were about six months out from completing the project and well into crunch, and everyone in the office came into work on a Monday morning after a much deserved Sunday off," he says. "I remember vividly having all of my senses assaulted upon taking my first step into the office. It smelled like I just stepped into the game at Biggy Man's Meat Factory. Fortunately where my office was in the building the smell was slightly less offensive. We called in the building maintenance crew multiple times to discover what the source of the smell was, but they were unable to locate the source so we were stuck to try and work long hours barely able to breathe. This lasted well over a week with the smell intensifying every day. Fresh air breaks became mandatory. Finally, unable to take it anymore, one of our programmers went on the hunt to identify the source of this offensive odour, as it was the most potent in the area of the office he and a couple other guys shared. After lifting up one of the ceiling tiles above his head and climbing up to look around, he found a rat that had perished."

The reboot might have had a painful gestation and failed to strike a chord with critics and the general public alike, but fans of the franchise still found merit in it. "It had plenty of problems – enemies and the kill animations were a bit repetitive, it could have used a bit more polish, load times were exceedingly high – but it's still a worthwhile game that had a lot of love put into it," says Caitlin. "Exceptionally gory, a silly story to tie it together, a great soundtrack, excellent voice work from Jim Cummings – all of those things made it worth the purchase for me, on top of the fact that it includes the arcade port of the original title as well as *Splatterhouse 2* and *Splatterhouse 3* on disc. I feel it was graded too harshly."

And so ends the *Splatterhouse* story. After the lukewarm response to the more recent title it is unlikely that Bandai Namco will revisit the series soon. It could be argued that the mantle of this franchise has been passed onto the likes of *Resident Evil*, *Silent Hill* and *The Evil Within*. While all of these titles are worthy of acclaim, we hope that we haven't seen the last of Rick, Jennifer and the Terror Mask (although the worm-infested fetuses we could do without, if we're brutally honest). *

## HORRIBLE BOSSES

Some of the worst mayors from the series and how to defeat them



### BIGGY MAN

■ One of the most terrifying bosses of the 1988 original, Biggy Man has chainsaws for hands and a sack on his head. His attacks can eat away at Rick's life quickly, so approach with caution.

**HOW TO BEAT THEM:** Your best hope of taking down Biggy Man is to make use of the nearby shotguns – you can attack safely from a distance, but watch your ammo.



### POLTERGEIST

■ This entity possesses objects and is encountered in every game bar the third. It attacks by using nearby artifacts against Rick.

**HOW TO BEAT THEM:** Positioning and timing is crucial. Watch for its movement patterns and make sure to stand in the right place to deal with the onslaught.



### BELLYACHE

■ The first boss of *Splatterhouse 2* on the Mega Drive is a slug-like creature with limited mobility but a ferocious appetite for human flesh. Even for his series, Bellyache is a particularly unpleasant enemy to face.

**HOW TO BEAT THEM:** Despite his disgusting appearance Bellyache is actually quite easy to deal with, succumbing to a few well-placed low kicks. Be sure to move away when he dies, as the explosion can kill.



### EVIL CROSS

■ This cross attacks Rick by hurling zombie heads in his direction, but was replaced in the TurboGrafx-16 version by a floating head.

**HOW TO BEAT THEM:** To take it down you first have to remove the orbiting heads and give yourself an opening to attack.



### JENNIFER

■ Rick's beloved becomes an enemy in many of the *Splatterhouse* games. In the first title her transformation is gruesome and during the battle she reverts to human form to beg for mercy.

**HOW TO BEAT THEM:** Keep moving and time your attacks well to take down your corrupted girlfriend – and don't allow her passionate entreaties to stay your hand – the only way to save her is to kill her!



### ULTIMATE EVIL

■ The final boss of the second game, this assortment of heads and body parts puts up quite a fight. Some of the heads belong to past enemies from the series.

**HOW TO BEAT THEM:** It takes around ten blows to destroy the Ultimate Evil. Watch for when it hovers off-screen, as it will still throw heads at you.



### GIANT BOREWORM

■ The second boss fight of the third game title, the Giant Boreworm is like the creatures seen in the first title but is larger and has two legs, allowing it greater mobility.

**HOW TO BEAT THEM:** Make sure you're aware of the other boreworms being released during this fight as they can make your life very difficult.



### EXPERIMENT 765

■ This ape-like creature has a hammer for an arm and electronical bolts protruding from its body. Immensely powerful, it's one of the most challenging monsters in the 2010 reboot and should be approached with care.

**HOW TO BEAT THEM:** This beast telegraphs its intentions clearly, so watch for signs and make sure you're out of the way before it unleashes one of its powerful attacks.



### FOUL BEAST

■ The first boss you encounter in the third *Splatterhouse*, the Foul Beast lives up to its name – when you remove its head it keeps on coming, with an extra arm appearing where the cranium once was.

**HOW TO BEAT THEM:** Keep moving and land hits on the Foul Beast to destroy it, and don't allow yourself a breather when you decapitate it – the fight isn't over by a long way.



### BEAST

■ This ugly creature will try and cram Rick into its massive, gaping mouth whenever possible. Incredibly powerful and prone to uncontrollable rages, this fellow poses quite a challenge even for a seasoned player.

**HOW TO BEAT THEM:** If you manage to perform a Splatterkill finisher on the Beast Rick will take it down by pulling its guts out.

CLASSIC MOMENTS

# Typhoon Thompson In Search For The Sea Child

» **PLATFORM:** AMIGA » **DEVELOPER:** DAN GORLIN PRODUCTIONS » **RELEASED:** 1989

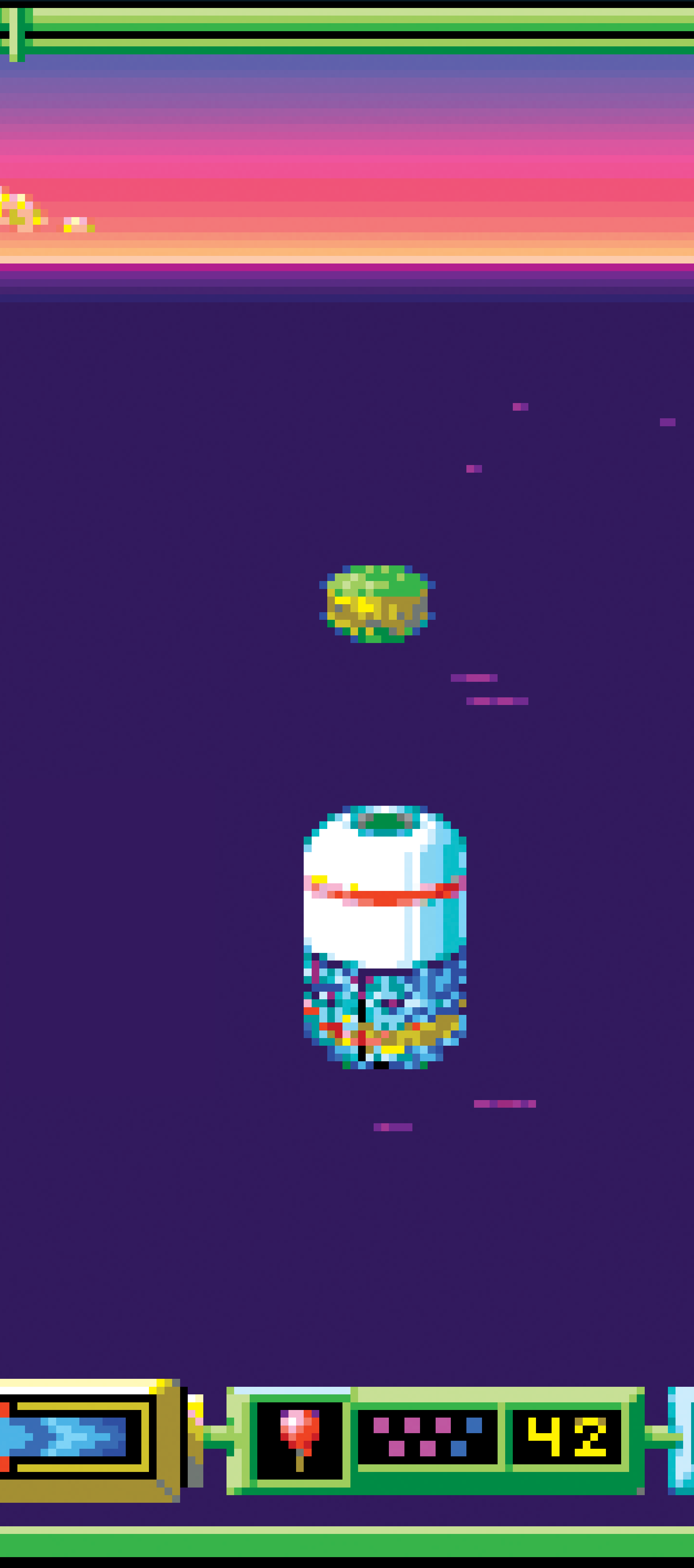
**A little polish goes a long way, and *Typhoon Thompson* is one of those games that decided that a little just wasn't enough.** As well as smooth 3D movement and excellent reflection effects, the game is filled with charming animations that really bring the game to life. Of course, this extends to the various different kinds of death you can experience throughout the game, from having your craft shattered to being encased in a bubble.

However, there's always a moment of panic when you take a hit, because *Typhoon Thompson* utilises an unusual dual lives system – depending on the enemy that scores the lethal hit, the damage will be done to either Typhoon or his craft, and they're not interchangeable. When you're on your last hit of either, your continued survival depends on being hit by the right type of enemy – and when that funny little animation confirms that your wish has come true and your spare craft was blown up rather than Typhoon himself, you'll thank your lucky stars. *



## BIO

Dan Gorlin's follow-up to the best-selling *Choplifter* was a long time coming, but when *Airheart* finally arrived in 1986 it stunned players with its 3D visuals. Three years later, he returned to the 3D shooting genre with the very similar *Typhoon Thompson In Search For The Sea Child*. Thompson's goal was to rescue a baby stranded on an ocean planet, jealously guarded by the native sea sprites. With excellent visuals and some unique ideas, the game caught the attention of the press, receiving high scores and 24th place in the top 100 games list in *Amiga Power*'s debut issue.




# MORE CLASSIC TYPHOON THOMPSON MOMENTS

## The First Hurdle



Making progress in *Typhoon Thompson* requires you to shoot down enemy weapons, grab the sea sprites that were piloting them and exchange them for the items you need. Not only is it immensely satisfying to methodically take down enemies one by one, but the furious animation of the sea sprite as you demand your dagger is great. Three more to go!

## Fishing With Lasers



In the first stage, sea sprites are easy to nab as they can just be caught after their weapons are destroyed. However, from the second stage onwards you will need to grab them quickly, or else they'll look to swim home. What's more, the cowards hide away underwater, so you'll need to land an accurate shot when they jump for air to stun them again.

## Deadly Aim

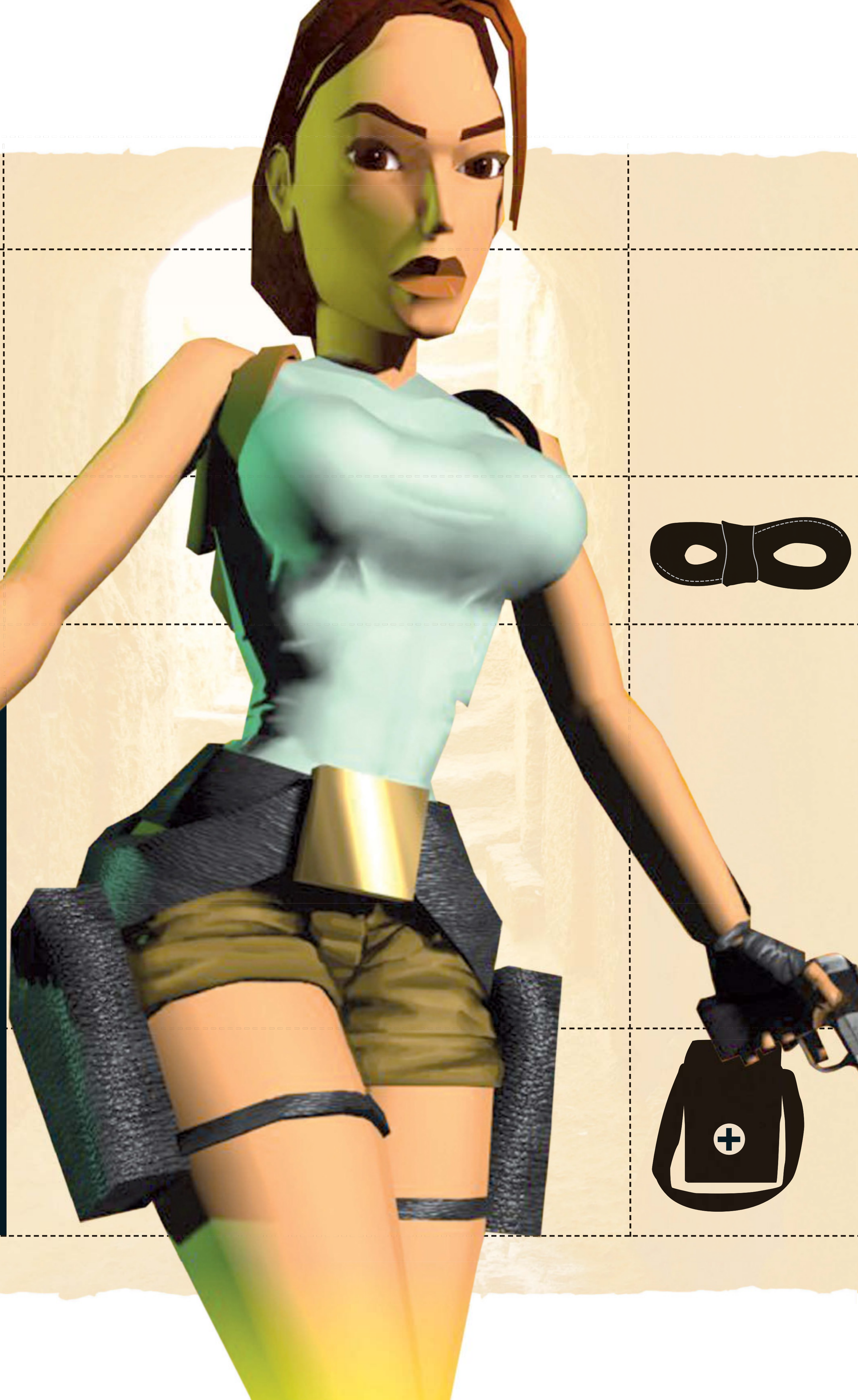


It's not easy to score a direct hit from range in *Typhoon Thompson* – your enemies are very mobile and your aim is affected by the direction in which you're moving, meaning that a straight shot requires you to hold still. As a result, picking off an enemy from long distance just feels great – just make sure to catch all of those sea sprites once you are done!

## Time Marches On



Sometimes it doesn't take much to create the right atmosphere in a game, and *Typhoon Thompson*'s minor backdrop changes are a great example as day gradually changes to night. As this day-night cycle is joined by a considered difficulty curve that gradually increases the intensity of your battles, your progress through the game feels natural and is easily measurable.



## TOMB RAIDER 101

■ The concept behind the original *Tomb Raider* was simple – a game of exploration, puzzle-solving and combat which starred a female version of Indiana Jones. One of the first major 3D action-adventure games, it set the template for the genre. The *Tomb Raider* game series has been rebooted twice and it now under the custodianship of Crystal Dynamics.

# TOMB RAIDER

## ALMOST 20 YEARS INTO HER CAREER, LARA CROFT SHOWS NO SIGNS OF SLOWING DOWN. IAN DRANSFIELD LOOKS BACK AT THE GAME THAT STARTED IT ALL – THE ORIGINAL, NON-REBOOTED, NOT STARRING ANGELINA JOLIE VERSION

**It's hard to imagine it but *Tomb Raider* wasn't always a phenomenon. When it released in October of 1996, landing first on the Sega Saturn (and not to hit its spiritual home of the** PlayStation until the following month), it was well-received… and that's about it. Fast-forward 19 years and here we are in a world where everybody knows the name Lara Croft, where gamers and non-gamers alike have played at least one *Tomb Raider* game, or have at least seen one of the movies.

So how do you go about manufacturing an icon? According to Adrian Smith, former operations and development director at Core Design, you don't. You just cobble together a few ideas. "Interestingly enough the original idea came from a couple of sketches that Toby [Gard] had and a couple of conversations we had," he explains.

"I can't remember the exact time, but my brother [Jeremy Heath-Smith, Core co-founder] and I had just come back from the Tokyo Game Show where we'd seen all the wonderful new titles about to be released, and it was very much a change in focus with a lot more 3D-style games because of the new hardware launching… the original idea for *Tomb Raider* came from there."

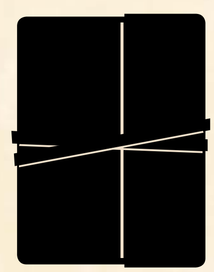
All the Indiana Joneses, adventuring explorers like Tintin, and contemporary archaeological legends definitely contributed to the final product, but the original spark of inspiration for *Tomb Raider* was a straightforward one. "It was as simple as saying, 'Wouldn't it be great to do something shrouded in mystery, Egypt and the temples, tombs…' That's how it started," Adrian recalls.

From the ideas jotted down and discussed came a concrete plan for a game – a plan that didn't waver much from day one to completion, as Adrian tells us. "The key bits of the game actually fell into place very quickly – the design which Toby wrote initially was a 12-page document." One key element of this document, of course, being the protagonist. "We knew this was not a character that needed to be a muscle-bound, gun-toting superhero," he explains. "We really didn't want that character, it came very easily to us to recognise that this character would be somebody we wanted the player to associate with and we saw that though all its iterations."

In fact, the character who became Lara Croft didn't actually have guns until about halfway through development of *Tomb Raider* – the team was that adamant it needed to get the exploration and puzzle-solving right first. "It really changed the focus," Adrian remembers. "As soon as you give someone guns they ▶









» [PC] Puzzles were taxing, but only as they required you to search every nook and cranny – usually for three MacGuffins.



» [PC] While quaint by modern standards, *Tomb Raider's* distinctive style does still stand out.



» [PC] It was never cutscene heavy, but *Tomb Raider* did every now and then veer into expository storytelling.

## IN THE KNOW

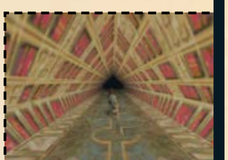
» **PUBLISHER:** Eidos Interactive
» **DEVELOPER:** Core Design
» **RELEASED:** 1996
» **PLATFORM:** Saturn, PlayStation, PC



» [PC] Few others in the history of gaming ever managed to create a sheer sense of vertigo like *Tomb Raider.*



» [PC] Your main antagonist here, after she's turned into a winged mutant beast.



» [PC] At one point, *Tomb Raider* had no sloping surfaces. The diagonal degree was added in.

turn into this Arnold Schwarzenegger-style character, and that wasn't what we wanted, we knew that very early on."

But eventually the plan changed; with the groundwork laid as a non-Arnie simulator, gunplay in *Tomb Raider* was presented as an additional mechanic, rather than the focus. "We decided we needed to add another element," Adrian says. "So bats and wolves came along – but then we had to figure out what Lara would do about them. Hence, we gave her guns. I think it enhanced the game, it added a level to Lara that allowed us to be more acrobatic. That spawned the running and gunning at the same time, then the twisting in the air, and from that the swallow dive came."




» Although it launched on Sega's Saturn, *Tomb Raider*'s success was on PlayStation.

This ability to be so nimble and change focus and ideas so quickly and efficiently wasn't by accident – Core's team was a small one, and its use of (at the time) non-standard building tools made the process of revisions faster and easier than it had been previously. Nathan McCree worked as composer on the original game, with some responsibility for producing the FMV and cutscene scripts. He explains how the team size at Core affected development: "There was a group of about six to eight people, expanding to about 12 to 15 with people who were brought in at various stages throughout the production. We all worked close to each other so people didn't really email each other, they just talked. It was a real melting pot of ideas."

This close proximity enabled an organic expansion to *Tomb Raider*, Nathan says, with ideas openly floated and discussed between junior and senior members of the team alike. "We were almost like a family, often going out together and partying. Many of us are still in contact and we get together when we can."

**Nathan admits that it wasn't perfect working on a smaller production, as *Tomb Raider* was back then,** with the smaller scale introducing its own problems. One of them being as simple as not having the time to get back down to London: "I remember we went over to London to record the voice artists in some sound studio," Nathan says. "Some days later back in Derby when I was editing all the audio, I discovered we had forgotten to record one of the characters in the script, and with only days to go before our final submission to the publisher there wasn't enough time to book another recording session. It became clear that I would have to do it myself. So I ended up playing the part of the Medieval Monk in the Lift FMV sequence which precedes the level St Francis' Folly."



But generally speaking the atmosphere within and size of *Tomb Raider*'s development team was a huge boon to the production. "I think levels of creativity are hard to maintain in a large team," Adrian explains. "It's an obvious thing to say, but when you're a small team and everyone is living and breathing [the game], then it does keep focus and motivation up. I'd say everyone in the team was a key stakeholder into the direction that the game took."

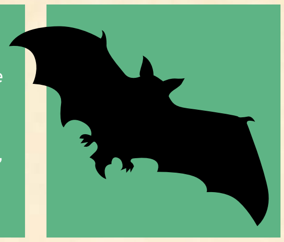
Of course, working so closely – literally and figuratively – with others

# ENDANGERED SPECIES

Mythical or real – Lara will kill it

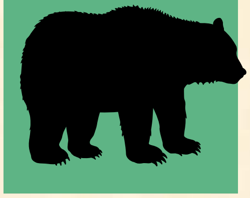
## BATS

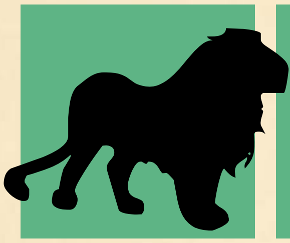
■ Squeaking, irritating little buggers bats might be, but don't underestimate their ability to put you off a jump, causing you to plummet to your death.



## BEARS

■ Moving silently, bears pack a hell of a punch when they get in close. Lara's agility is her best bet here – that or just hiding in pools until the bear gets bored…





## LIONS

■ Another beastie that can do a lot of damage if it gets in close, the best thing to do is flip around like a madwoman in order to confuse and frighten the king of the jungle. Then shoot it.



## CENTAURS

■ Obviously there are centaurs. Sigh. These mythical gits lob painful exploding fireballs at Lara, meaning they should be avoided at all costs. Just run away, if you can.



## CLONE

■ A skinless clone of Lara that mimics your every move – oh, and any damage you inflict on it is inflicted back on you. Hmm, if only there were some handy trapdoor into a lava pit nearby…

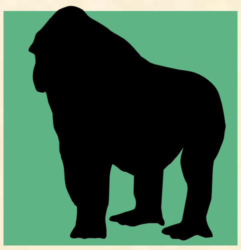
## MUTANT (GIANT, NO LEGS)

■ This…thing might not have legs, but it more than makes up for it by looking terrifying and being able to kill you quickly.



## GORILLAS

■ We know them to be close relatives of ours, and intelligent, but it seems Lara doesn't care and wishes nothing but death on our cousins. Hmm.



## MUMMIFIED MUTANTS

■ Why the Egyptians would be mummifying these monstrosities we do not know. They explode, because why not?









## MUTANTS (ALL FOURS)

■ Some mutants never developed the ability to walk upright, instead sticking to all fours and they're generally irritating.



## RATS

■ What game would be complete without a smattering of vermin. *Tomb Raider*'s rats are an irritation, nothing more. Like bats, but with less flying.

## PEOPLE

■ Of course, the most dangerous animal in Lara's way is other people. These antagonists are dangerous because they can actually shoot back at Lara.

## FLYING MUTANTS

■ What's worse than a mutant? A flying mutant. These monsters aren't too difficult to deal with, but if you're not paying attention they can cause some pain.



## RAPTORS

■ On a scale of 'one' to 'unexpected', Velociraptors turning up quite early on in *Tomb Raider* ranks as 'unexpected'. Then its larger cousin appears soon after…





## MUTANTS (BIPEDAL)

■ Some skinless mutants *did* figure out how to walk upright, but instead of being happy about it we are just unnerved.







## WOLVES

■ A wolf is little problem for Lara. Unfortunately, wolves operate in packs, and six-on-one is the kind of odds that causes Ms Croft problems. Dodge, roll and dive a lot.





## CROCODILES

■ These green berks aren't difficult to deal with on land, but the problem is you often encounter them while going for a dip. Get out, dry off, make some new luggage.



## TYRANNOSAURUS REX

■ *Tomb Raider*'s most famous enemy comes early on in the game and is easy to defeat. If you hide in the crevice, it can't get to you. No wonder its extinct.

✕ UNUSUAL CREATURES



» [PC] The symbol on health packs was asked to be removed by a 'certain organisation sporting the same logo'.



» [PC] The tradition of violent ends to Lara's quest continues to this day, but little is more horrifying than swan diving onto the ground.



» [PC] Lara's home wasn't just a nice touch – it was a tutorial. You could even lock the butler in her pantry in the second game.

▶ brought its own set of problems, and both Adrian and Nathan highlight the sometimes 'heated' discussions that would be had over the smallest of points – like how the camera would operate on Lara entering a room, or the fact the game originally had no slopes in it whatsoever. But both maintained that this open, frank and agile form of development was one of *Tomb Raider*'s biggest boons.

Said agility came from a toolbox the team created internally to help speed up production of new levels and in-game mechanics – something that could be modified quickly and tested or reviewed almost as soon as it was implemented. "I think that was one of the key elements of its success," Adrian explains. "The ability to, across the team, be able to play it, review it and change it very easily."

While discussions raised the temperature in the small Derby office, there wasn't much in the way of disagreement internally. In fact, the only major point of contention was one raised by the publisher, Eidos, which tried to convince the team at Core to steer things away from a female protagonist.

"It said things like 'Don't do a game with a female character – at least have a male character in there so the player has a choice,'" Adrian says. "Many of those decisions were openly discussed and the team stood fast on them, and it was quite right to do so. *Tomb Raider* would have been quite a different game if the player had a choice between a man or woman character. It was asked for, and we said, 'No, it's the core of what this game is about – it's about this character.'"

That character, Lara Croft, became an icon – featuring on the front cover of magazines, going on tour with U2, having a couple of films made of her adventures, you know how it panned out. But initially she was focused on by an immature gaming press and fan base devoted to the size of her breasts.

Those polygonal things jutting out of her chest were the focus of way too much attention back in the mid-Nineties, and it's something Adrian tells us he found amusing. "She was a cartoon character to us," he laughs. "It's no more than like on *Tom & Jerry* when Tom gets his foot hit by a hammer and it swells to ten times the size. The technology didn't allow us to make her visually as we wanted, so it was more of a way of hiking certain things so it would give her some shape – it was that simple."

» [PC] *Tomb Raider* brought in many influences from various mythologies – like Thor's hammer, seen here.



» [PC] Retrieving cogs was a typical example of the puzzles found in *Tomb Raider*.



**As the attention on Lara grew, more people were drawn to actually play *Tomb Raider*. In it they were welcomed by a unique proposition; a game** that didn't offer much sympathy, and one that would just as often reward random exploration as it would punish it. One minute you were discovering a hidden ammo pouch and health pack behind an ancient statue of a cat, the next you were being chased by a bunch of Velociraptors into the path of a Tyrannosaurus Rex.

Everyone remembers the first time they found the giant hand in Palace Midas – the temptation to climb on it being too great, only to be instantly met by Lara's death as she turned to gold. Speaking of death, this was another key element to the game – something that punished the player but offered some level of gratification as your on-screen avatar burned, suffocated or plummeted to her demise. It sounds wrong, but if you find someone who played *Tomb Raider* and *didn't* dive off a cliff onto solid ground, you've found a liar.

Adrian's favourite moments of *Tomb Raider*, though, come in a different form – those of a man on the other side of the fence. "It got updated, but originally there were three secrets on each level with a total of 100 in the game," he explains, "We started to get phone calls from people while we were working on the second game, four in the morning in tears, saying 'I'm playing the game, I've got 99 secrets, please tell me where the last one is, I can't get 100!'

"We discovered – and we did chuckle – the programmers had done the counter for the secrets, but it was never made to cater for three digits, so even



## DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

**CHUCK ROCK**
**SYSTEM:** ATARI ST, AMIGA
**YEAR:** 1991

**FIRESTORM: THUNDERHAWK 2**
**(PICTURED)**
**SYSTEM:** PC, PLAYSTATION
**YEAR:** 1995

**PROJECT EDEN**
**SYSTEM:** PC, PS2
**YEAR:** 2001

## "GAME OVER MAN" The unfortunate misadventures of Lara Croft



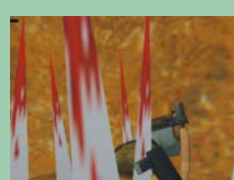
### THE SWORD OF DAMOCLES

■ What's that shadow on the floor for? Oh, it's just a gargantuan sword hanging above you, ready to plummet down on your head. And remember: in the Greek tale it was just the one sword. In *Tomb Raider*, it's about a dozen.



### DROWNING

■ Most of the time you're panicking as you try desperately to get Lara up and out of the water, back into the welcoming lung-filling embrace of breathable air. If you don't make it, you feel truly awful – even 20 years later, it's still a seriously uncomfortable sight to behold.



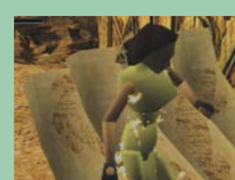
### IMPALEMENT

■ It's one thing to fall way too far and snap poor Lara's neck, as we all did a million times in *Tomb Raider*, but there's something that much more shocking about her short, ever more violent plummets onto the beds of spikes left around by dozens of mad ancient bastards.



### LAVA

■ Why is that bit of floor red? Oh right because it's intensely hot molten rock and now Lara's on fire. And dead. Just when you think the falls and spikes and animals are as bad as it can get, half of the floors you encounter in the latter parts of *Tomb Raider* become deadly.



### THE MIDAS TOUCH

■ One of the greatest – and cruellest – surprises in any game, Core introduced the hand of Midas to tempt players to climb on it. What happened when you, inevitably, did? Why, the king's touch did what it did best: turned you to gold. Cold, hard, *dead* gold.



» [PC] Later on in the game, things get… well, a bit weird. Apparently the Great Pyramid is alive inside?

though people were finding all hundred secrets, the counter only went to 99. These poor people… we told them, 'Just keep playing, you'll find it…' So it was a change that we had to make quickly, but I do remember we all [laughed], it was something we all missed."

While light relief was had by the team, there were things about the experience working on *Tomb Raider* that Adrian wasn't so enamoured with. "All the nights we burned on it. It was hard work," he laments. But at the same time, Adrian acknowledges this hard work was rewarding and paid off. "It was a labour of love," he says. "People got protective and passionate about it, and that brings quite a few arguments and raised voices. But overall finishing it was fantastic."

It wasn't long after completing development and releasing *Tomb Raider* that the phenomenon began to take off. It's easy to forget that in 1996 this was a new type of game – and nothing before had starred such a unique lead character. The hype train got up to full speed and the legend of Lara and her tomb raiding adventures was underway.

**Nathan explains how the team was taken somewhat by surprise when *Tomb Raider* – and Lara's star began to shine so brightly. "I don't think** any of us really knew how famous it would become. It's not something that any of the team really thought about I don't think… *Tomb Raider* for me was just another game in a long list of games that I worked on. It wasn't until it hit the charts and we saw the reviews that we knew we had something special."

Adrian echoes this surprise, though his experience of realising *Tomb Raider* might become a monster came from marketing meetings with publishers. "I remember sitting in a room with all the sales and distribution teams and they were banding these figures around and we'd never predicted this game would do millions. That's when the fear really hit! I thought 'Christ, we'll probably have to finish this now…'"

**"IT WASN'T UNTIL [TOMB RAIDER] HIT THE CHARTS AND WE SAW THE REVIEWS THAT WE KNEW WE HAD SOMETHING SPECIAL"** Nathan McCree

As her star grew, Lara became more of the focus, overshadowing the *Tomb Raider* game that was meant to be what we were all talking about. It didn't bother the team at Core, however, and in fact the studio started to have a bit of fun with the increased attention their creation was getting. "Tongue in cheek we did many things," Adrian laughs, "I remember as the level of interest began to rise we had questions like, 'When's her birthday?' We just flippantly said, 'Well, it's February 14' –things that sprang to mind. These things stuck and got woven into Lara's fabric and really became part of her. 'Where did she go to school?' Well we sent her to an all boys school – shows what we knew."

Sequels inevitably followed, even though the original plan was for one game and no more. Teams changed and were moved to try and keep creativity flowing, but ultimately the spark dimmed. Lara's appeal began to fade. After a disastrous release of *Tomb Raider: Angel of Darkness*, Core Design was stripped of its own creation, with Lara and her adventures passed on to the US-based Crystal Dynamics for its 2006 release of *Tomb Raider: Legend*. The title was apt, and the rebirth of a true gaming superstar began in earnest – but the writing was on the wall for Core.

It was a sad end from such a bright beginning, but one neither Adrian nor Nathan has hard feelings about: "I really enjoyed it," Nathan smiles. "Of course I loved writing the music but also working with the script writer and voice artists and producing the video sequences. I can't think of a better job to do."

Adrian's pride is also palpable – this was something that became huge, from a small British team, crafted from an original idea. "I'm hugely proud of it," he said, "I'm sure all the team that worked on it is proud, and they should be as well.

"We created something that has stood the test of time – I don't think we should underestimate that, and I don't think you can be anything else other than proud. You can only look back on it – even though it was sad at the end – very positively. It was a hell of an experience one that I'm pleased I was part of." *

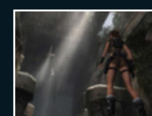


» [PC] It is blocky, textures are low quality, the draw distance is poor… but *Tomb Raider* still has an incredible feel to it.

## THE DYNAMIC EFFECT

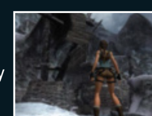
**Once Lara was ripped from the grasp of her creators, she went to live at US-based Crystal Dynamics. While many worried about this fearing the worst for a British heroine, history has shown her now decade-long custodians know how to make a great Tomb Raider game**

### TOMB RAIDER: LEGEND 2006



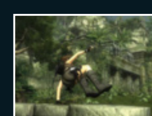
■ Crystal Dynamics surprised a lot of people with its first take on *Tomb Raider*, mainly because it was good. Like, good to the point that a lot of people immediately forgot about Core Design. *Legend* was a bold opening statement that paid off.

### TOMB RAIDER: ANNIVERSARY 2007



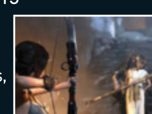
■ A remake of the 1996 original, *Anniversary* was both a tenth birthday present for *Tomb Raider* and a rather bloody good game in its own right. Not a re-skin but a full rebirth, this was a fine game to complement the original, sitting proudly alongside it.

### TOMB RAIDER: UNDERWORLD 2008



■ Probably the least memorable of Crystal Dynamics' *Tomb Raider* output, *Underworld* wasn't bad in the slightest – it was just a bit dull. It showed that CD's refined formula, its take on the original *Tomb Raider*, needed freshening up in some way.

### TOMB RAIDER 2013



■ And so Crystal Dynamics did indeed reboot Lara's adventures, giving us an origins story for Ms Croft and an adventure that took a fair few cues from the likes of *Uncharted*, *Hunger Games* and *Far Cry* and others, essentially imitating its imitators.

### RISE OF THE TOMB RAIDER 2015



■ The latest from those holding the hand of Lara, *Rise* shows more growth for the character and, more importantly, reintroduces a lot more tombs. It will never have quite as many as the 1996 original, but then what does?

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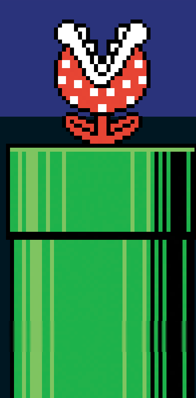


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BEST GAMING ACHIEVEMENT
Fullscreen parallax scrolling on the C64

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BEST HOLIDAY
Vietnam, Lao and Cambodia on a scooter with the missus

WHO YOU WANT TO BE STRANDED WITH
My wife Thy, though she'd moan like f**k!

177835-4674443983O6522

SEX
F

NAME
Patricia Curtis

DATE OF BIRTH
08.08.1959

PLACE OF BIRTH
Enfield, London

BIOGRAPHY
Born Delvin Sorrell, Patricia started coding for the C64 before moving on to the 16-bit computers and consoles. She changed gender in the Nineties and continues to develop mobile games as Lucky Red Fish.

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"If I'm at a party and people ask me what games I've worked on, I'll say Sensible Soccer. That gets you kudos with normal people"

Patricia Curtis

DESERT • ISLAND DISKS

# Patricia Curtis

## What cherished games would you take to the island?

**Since starting out on the Commodore 64, Patricia Curtis has lived through some radical changes, both on and off screen. She tells Paul Drury about Turtles, Terminator and tranny clubs**

**Patricia beams at us from the other side from the other side of the table, "My games career in the beginning was like the summer," she begins. "It was amazing for ten years, like one long sunny day… and then the winter came."**

We are tucking into spring rolls, beautifully cooked by her wife, Thy, who learned her culinary skills in her native country of Vietnam. The sun is streaming through the broad windows of their flat in Nottingham, overlooking the city's Arboretum park, and after several hours of talking about the golden days of her career, Patricia has reached the part of the story when things go dark.

"I had a very good career up until 1995 when I changed gender. Then the industry turned its back on me. I'd just got a job at Psygnosis but some of the people there didn't like the idea of someone transgender working for the company. I lost my career through some shenanigans. I went from having a great job to being homeless within a few years and it's been a slow climb back…"

You will probably have played many of the games Patricia produced from the mid-Eighties to the mid-Nineties, particularly her high-profile conversions of *Xenon 2*, *Sensible Soccer* and *Teenage Mutant Hero Turtles*, but it's unlikely you'll recognise the name. Back when she was coding, she was known as Delvin Sorrell, an Essex boy who'd swapped truck engines for sprite engines when the Commodore 64 had come along.

Patricia had left school in 1975 aged 15, her only encounter with computers having been colouring in black dots on punchcards before they were sent off to a faraway mainframe, only to receive the inevitable 'Syntax Error' message back a week later. She became an apprentice at a garage near to her home and spent the next decade working as a truck mechanic. Taking on such a stereotypical masculine role, we can't help wondering if she knew she was transgender at this point?

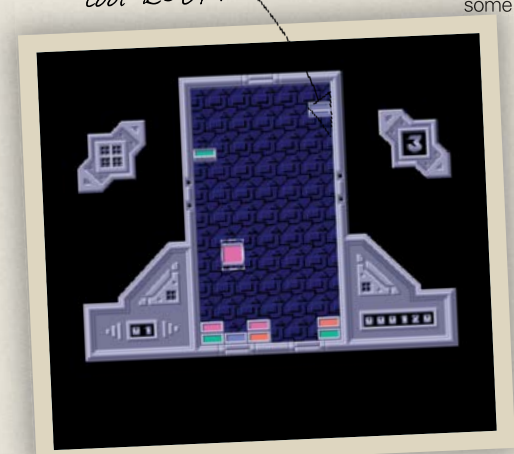
"Oh, I knew, I had been dressing in girl's clothes since I was six years old," she laughs, "but the only chance you get to do that in public is fancy dress. So I went to as many fancy dress parties as I could! But you see, when you're transgender, you try to hide it all."

Which kind of explains why she ended up moving from one male-dominated career to another. In 1982, a friend of her brother bought himself a Commodore 64, the first one to arrive on their council estate, and Patricia instantly knew she had to have one, too. Soon that beige box of tricks was sat in the living room and she spent every spare hour tapping away, first in BASIC before progressing to machine code. Her first proper effort was *Cyril*, a *Hunchback* clone, starring a rock-dodging caveman, which was good enough for her to send to Telecomsoft. Colin Fuidge, a manager at the label, invited her up to London for an interview so Patricia duly asked for the day off work. When her boss declined, she told him to stick his job and headed to London regardless. "Walking into the BT offices was impressive," recalls Patricia, "with all the pictures of games it'd done. But then they just sat me down and showed me this game and said, 'What do you think of that?' So I said, 'Erm, it's a nice game.' It wasn't, but you're not gonna say it's crap, sat in their offices with all these producers, are you? They said, 'Okay,' and sent me home. I thought, 'What the f**k was that?'"

Patricia returned home, confused, only to receive a call from Colin that evening offering her £2000 to convert *The Happiest Days Of Your Life*, the game she'd been shown, to the C64 in two months and promising her a Spectrum 128 was in the post. With the Speccy original playing the school-based sub-*Pyjamarama* collect-'em-up adventure next to her Commodore, she completed the job, though was docked £500 for taking ten weeks. "I learned an important lesson," she winks. "Don't be late! I was claiming benefits after chucking my job in so I went down the dole office and said, 'I earned £1500 today.' So they docked me one day's benefit!"

**Trivia**

**Patricia was involved in publishing seminal hip hop, funk and graffiti magazine *Big Daddy* in the Nineties and early-Noughties. Word.**



[Amiga] Zyconix: This Tetris-inspired puzzler earned Patricia a cool £30K.



» [C64] *Skateboard Joust* was one of the weirder titles Patricia was asked to port.

## Praise for Patricia

Here's what **Retro Gamer** has to say about Patricia Curtis's games…





**Darran Jones**
Being a fan of shoot-'em-ups, *Xenon 2* is my obvious choice. It's a solid conversion of the popular Amiga game and it has some absolutely gigantic bosses in it. The pace is a little too slow to my tastes, but the eclectic range of weapons and imaginative bosses ensure it's always entertaining to play.





**Paul Drury**
A prolific programmer and a wonderful storyteller, Patricia is great company and it's a shame prejudice shortened her time in the industry. You may have played her solid conversion work, particularly *Xenon 2*, but we recommend you also try *Scorpius* and *Super Methane Brothers*.

A happy day indeed and with her first published title on the shelves, Patricia began work on her own original game. Inspired by *R-Type*, *Scorpius* was a serious shooter, featuring fancy fullscreen parallax scrolling and intimidating boss battles. Recognising she would need help with the visuals for this underwater epic, she put an ad in her local paper. "A bloke rang me up and so I popped round to his house and there were these two teenagers. They showed me some really nice art and music and some game ideas they were playing with. I could tell they were really good and they were nice lads so I said, great let's do it!"

The boys in question were none other than the Rowlands brothers, who would go on to find fame with *Creatures* and *Mayhem In Monsterland*, and the trio beavered away in a little office in Chelmsford creating their fine shooter. Sadly, publishers Telecomsoft has just signed up similar shoot-'em-up *IO* for its Rainbird label, so it opted to make *Scorpius* a budget release, meaning it was unfairly overshadowed.

A safer bet for Patricia was taking on conversion work and she did a creditable job of porting *Super Robin Hood* from the Spectrum to the C64 in 1987 for Codemasters, turning the flip screen original into a scrolling forest adventure in the process. Not all conversions worked out as successfully, though. *GI Hero*, completed in 1988, seems to only have had a very limited release and *Skateboard Joust*, released the same year, was an ill-advised mash-up of Williams' ostrich-riding arcade hit and Atari's *720°*, with some Daleks thrown in for good measure. "That was like, what the f**k?" Patricia says, shaking her head, "but you get sent the game and you say, 'Yeah, when do you want that done for?' And I'd knock it out. I was a bread and butter programmer in many ways. You want it done quick? Come and see me. I was the Del Boy of the games industry. I even wore a beige Crombie!"

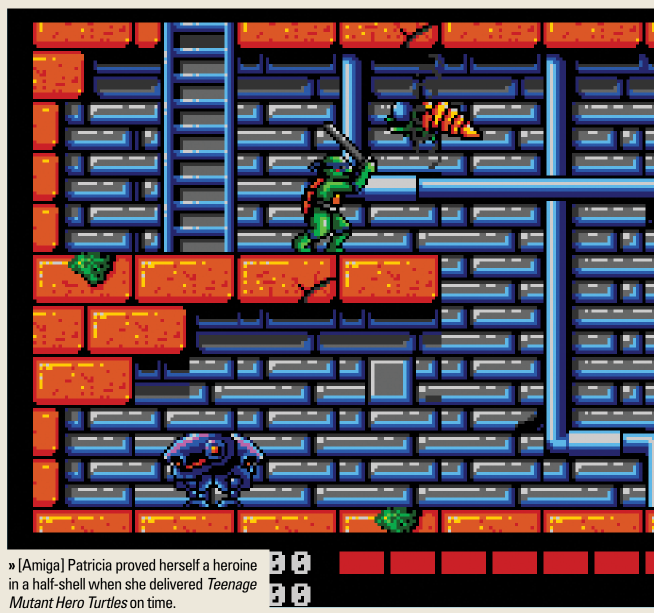
In true *Only Fools And Horses* fashion, Patricia had big dreams that were frequently crushed by misfortune. Take *Bushido Warriors*, one of her proudest achievements, which was all ready for release and had reviewed very positively in the French gaming press, only to be lost when publishers Ariolasoft went bust. Then there was *Bounce 'N*, an isometric puzzler that Microprose were going to release but never did and a *Marble Madness* clone, which Mark Cale at System 3 was interested in publishing until *Gyroscope* came out.

Prolific Patricia was not to be deterred, though. Still coding from her mum's front room, the late-Eighties saw her produce scrolling beat-'em-up *Street Warriors*, which was unfortunately afflicted with "bitching glitching", as Patricia puts it, and the far better *Auto Test*, which combined her love of cars and coding and kept the cash rolling in. "I had enough to buy a Lotus Elite," she mentions, nonchalantly. "Some wanker from the estate stubbed his fag out on the bonnet. Just jealousy."

It was fast cars but not loose women for Patricia, who was married by now, another case of her overcompensating for her true transgender identity "A lot of trannies are married," she explains. "In fact, she was the one who encouraged me to come out. If you look at my life, it's very masculine. Computer programming, trucks – you try and fight it in a really harsh way but the worst thing is, that makes you more like a man, in your mannerisms, your language…"

As the Nineties dawned, Patricia embraced those ubiquitous amphibious ninjas by taking on the Atari ST conversion of *Teenage Mutant Hero Turtles*, despite Fergus McGovern at Mirrorsoft giving her a ridiculously tight three month deadline to get the game out in time for Christmas. "My first reaction was, 'Oh f**k,'" explains Patricia. "It was the first time in my career I'd actually been sent any source code but it was the arcade game running in C on the Amiga and it was terrible. The scrolling was chugging along, so I ended up redoing that as well and asked for 15 grand for both the ST and Amiga versions. Bearing in mind their Amiga version was shit, Fergus said, 'Great!'"

The game duly rode the half-shell hysteria of the day and topped the Christmas charts in 1990, earning Patricia an industry award the following year which acknowledged the



» [Amiga] Patricia proved herself a heroine in a half-shell when she delivered *Teenage Mutant Hero Turtles* on time.

## Timeline

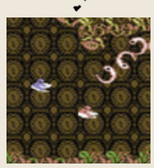
**1986**

**THE HAPPIEST DAYS OF YOUR LIFE**
■ **YEAR:** 1986
■ **FORMAT:** C64
Patricia's first commercial release was a conversion of a somewhat lacklustre Spectrum arcade adventure.



**1988**

**SCORPIUS**
■ **YEAR:** 1988
■ **FORMAT:** C64
A cracking collaboration with the Rowlands brothers, this technically impressive underwater shoot-'em-up was unfairly overlooked on release.



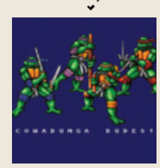
**1990**

**AUTO TEST**
■ **YEAR:** 1990
■ **FORMAT:** C64
Bringing together two of Patricia's loves, cars and code, this thoughtful, carefully tuned overhead driving sim is definitely not bollards.



**1990**

**TEENAGE MUTANT HERO TURTLES**
■ **YEAR:** 1990
■ **FORMAT:** ST/Amiga
A big hit at Christmas 1990, Patricia put in many 48 hour coding shifts to deliver both 16-bit versions in time for Santa.



# The Special One

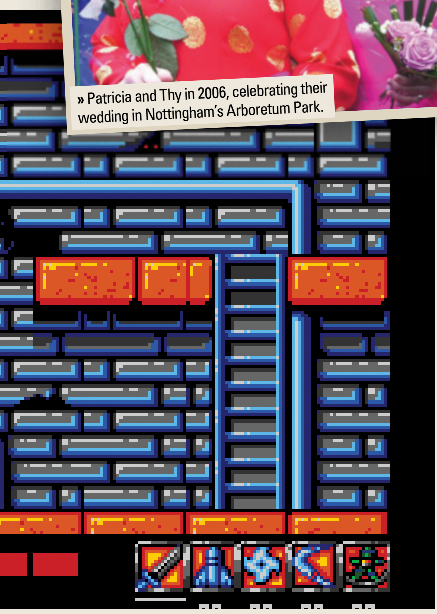
Though Patricia has had numerous games go unfinished or unreleased, we were intrigued to see she'd worked on *Dick Special*, a lost project begun by Sandy '*Ant Attack*' White. "It was Sandy's ex-partner Angela Sutherland's thing by the time I got involved," she explains. "I roped in Nick Pelling (of *Frak!* fame) and we had a plan to get these massive levels on an Amiga using texture tiling. It was quite bold and I got loads of it done, lots of rooms and a ship, but I kept having to harangue Angela as she was doing the f**king art!" The project died when Acclaim pulled out of the UK but Patricia bought the rights to the character for £1000 and hints that Dick may rise again one day…




» [C64] Help clear up litter whilst ignoring global deforestation in *McDonald Land*.



» Patricia and Thy in 2006, celebrating their wedding in Nottingham's Arboretum Park.



game's impressive sales figures. "Plus I was king of my nieces and nephews because I could hand out all this *Turtles* promotional shit they sent me," she laughs.

The first half of the new decade continued in a similarly successful vein. Moving onto the 16-bit computers and consoles, Patricia found a lucrative niche converting SNES titles to the Mega Drive, handling big name licences such as *Terminator 2* and *Clay Fighters 2*, as well as bringing a much loved footy game to the CD32. "If I'm at a party and people ask me what games I've worked on, I'll say *Sensible Soccer*. That gets you kudos with normal people. For me, the kudos was converting *Xenon 2* to the Mega Drive. It's a beautiful game and the Bitmap Brothers were promoted in the industry as the pinnacle of programmers. They were like Charles and Diana to me!"

Patricia still found time to work on original titles, though, producing puzzler *Zyconix* for the Amiga and ST, which pocketed her the tidy sum of £30,000 for one month's work, and the C64 Big Mac-based platformer *McDonald Land*. Did she have any qualms creating a game for a multi-national junk food chain, we wonder? "Oh burgers didn't kill you in them days. Coke wasn't bad for you and there was no global warming. I hired a team and got a unit. We had plants in the office! They gave us the brief, picking up litter, and we designed all the levels and coded it. If you look at the some of the later levels, you'll see our names in the stars."

Now heading up a small development team, Patricia landed the biggest payday of her career, earning a staggering £134,000 for Mega Drive title *Marsupilami*, a puzzle-tinged platformer based on a French comic book character. This large injection of cash allowed the team to develop two original titles for the Amiga and its console spin-off the CD32. *Death Mask* was a rather jerky *Doom* clone but *Super Methane Brothers* was an impressive homage to *Bubble Bobble*, full of neat touches and excelling in co-op mode. "I think it's awesome," she enthuses. "There are loads of secrets in it, too, but yeah, we were backing the wrong horse with the CD32. And we had this marketing guy who, like they all do, promised the earth and was shit."

By 1995, things had reached a tipping point for Patricia, both personally and professionally. It was the year she completed her gender transition, having been living as a

## Curtis on Curtis

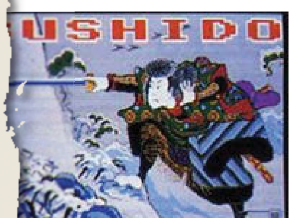


Patricia picks her three favourite projects



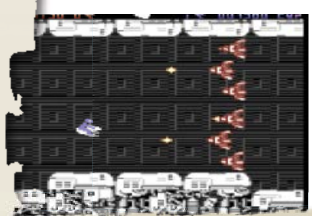
■ **MONKEY MOFO**

It's been a labour of love. I have put more love into *Monkey Mofo* than any of my previous games. Don't get me wrong, though, all my games have had a lot of love put into them, especially my original projects, but *Monkey Mofo* had the most love piled into it.



■ **BUSHIDO WARRIORS**

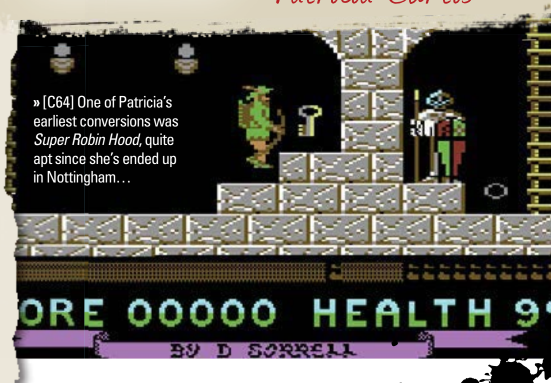
You remember when I said that my time in the videogames industry was like the summer? Well, my time working on *Bushido Warriors* was essentially the sunniest day of my summer. A whole lot of love went into this project. It was the summer of love!



■ **SCORPIUS**

I like shoot-'em-ups and I could've said *Xenon 2* but I'll say *Scorpius*, because of the time I did it. It was the start of my career and my first original title and that's always going to make it special. My first labour of love!

> "I was the Del Boy of the games industry. I even wore a beige Crombie!" *Patricia Curtis*




» [C64] One of Patricia's earliest conversions was *Super Robin Hood*, quite apt since she's ended up in Nottingham…

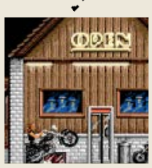
1992

**MCDONALD LAND**
■ **YEAR:** 1992
■ **FORMAT:** C64
You may understandably scoff at a game sponsored by a junk food chain that has a strong environmental message but it's actually quite a tasty platformer.



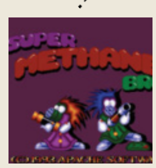
1992

**TERMINATOR 2**
■ **YEAR:** 1992
■ **FORMAT:** Mega Drive
Patricia handled many conversions of big name titles, including this Mega Drive port of one of Arnie's better videogame outings.



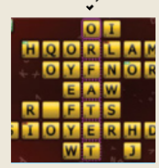
1993

**SUPER METHANE BROTHERS**
■ **YEAR:** 1993
■ **FORMAT:** Amiga/CD32
Clearly inspired by *Bubble Bobble*, you play as Puff and Blow battling against the bad guys in an entertaining game which is full of secrets to unlock.




2015

**WORD JUNKIE**
■ **YEAR:** 2015
■ **FORMAT:** Android
Patricia is still coding from her bedroom and her latest project is this ingenious little word game, an addictive mix of *Boggle* and *Meteos*.



# Readers' Questions

**Tapmantwo:** What is your preferred genre and the best game you produced in that genre?
**My favourite genre is platform games but I haven't done a really good one of them yet! The reason I've done so many genres is why stick with one thing? Games development isn't like that. It's like a kid in a sweet shop – 'Oh, that's nice, I'll have some of that.' You see something and you think, 'I can do that.' You go home and you work on it and that becomes part of your skill set.**

**Merman:** Do you still use any of the old machines and would you ever code for them again?
**Having been homeless, I lost all my equipment so no, I don't own any of my old machines. I kind of think, 'Been there, done that'... and it was great.**

**MartynC:** How did your fellow programmers react to you becoming Patricia?
**Before I changed gender, I came out at a computer show in London. We were all in a pub afterwards, Nick Pelling, Gary Liddon and a bunch of friends from the industry, and I said, 'I've got some news.' They all thought I had AIDS because I'd lost so much weight. I said, 'No, I'm transgender.' They just said, 'Oh right.' It just wasn't a problem for them.**

**David:** What's with the name change?
**Curtis was my mum's maiden name and I thought Trish was a pretty friendly sounding name, so I chose that. And I used to really fancy this girl called Patricia when I was young!**

**Skrunch:** What advice have you for an up-and-coming game developer?
**I'm sorry, my friend. Games development isn't what it used to be. If you've seen *Indie Game: The Movie* and thought you could get rich, those days are long gone. Unless you've got a million dollar marketing budget, you're not going to make it.**

**Merman:** Which game do you wish you had written?
***Super Mario Galaxy*. A superb piece of software engineering. It's absolutely beautiful.**



» [Mobile] Patricia's still developing original Android titles such as *Monkey MoFo*.

woman for the previous two, and also saw the end of her marriage, which took a heavy emotional toll. Contract work dried up and she was forced to disband her development team, a result of prejudice against her transgender identity she suspects, though she does acknowledge her part in this. "Oh there were the drugs," she says, rolling her eyes. "I took lots of Ecstasy and there was lots of dancing. I had money, what do you expect? I went to a tranny club in Nottingham and I was like, 'F**k this, I'm not one of these.' They were all men wearing their mums' frocks. But I met someone there who said, come to this gay club, and that was great."

Having closed her studio down, Patricia managed to land a role at Psygnosis' London studio as a lead programmer on prestigious PlayStation projects. However, what should have been the start of an exciting new chapter in Patricia's career quickly turned sour.

"They kept me waiting for nearly two months and when I finally got started, they wouldn't let me on my team," she explains. "I was sitting there twiddling my f**king thumbs and they wouldn't give me anything to do. I found out afterwards that this producer had said, 'We don't want a tranny on our team do we?' This **** used to come and play *Command & Conquer* with me at lunchtime! There was a lot of nasty talk behind my back..."

Patricia ended up being forced out of Psygnosis and found herself frozen out of the industry she'd been so involved in for the previous decade. Unable to pay the rent on her London flat, she became homeless and moved to Nottingham, staying on friends' sofas for six months. She left games behind for a while as she got her life back on track, getting involved in numerous ventures, from constructing a pyramid marketing scheme website for local drug dealers to building a school in Vietnam alongside her wife-to-be, Thy, and publishing a hip hop magazine.

By 2004, Patricia was back at the code face, reaching the finals of a Samsung Java competition with mobile game *Monkey Madness* and writing *Tonga* for Big Fish Games, a marble-pinging, colour matching game for PC and mobiles. Her most recent release, 2014's *Monkey MoFo*, which replaces mice with apes in a *ChuChu Rocket* homage, is a particular source of pride, though she recognises any lone developer struggles to get their work noticed these days.

"I'm a games programmer and it's what I love," she sighs, "but the f**king marketing men have moved in to mobile games. They take over and the whole industry gets f**ked. They spend millions on pushing their games and it becomes *Candy Crush* land. But I've still got my hand in, I still hope. I've got two Xbox One development kits and *Unreal Engine*. I've been writing this *Mario*-style game with f**ked up gravity. If anyone is reading this and wants to do some really good game art for it, email me!"

You'll find her at luckyredfish.com folks. Here's to the start of a beautiful friendship. *

## Trivia

**Patricia coded under the company name Daisysoft, as a nod to the nickname of her brother's friend Michael Smale, who had first shown her a C64.**

> "My games career was amazing for ten years, like one long sunny day... and then the winter came"
> *Patricia Curtis*



» [CD32] *Death Mask* tried to mix *Doom* with *Virtua Cop*-style pop up targets with questionable success.

**Many thanks to Patricia and Thy for their hospitality, Frank for the introduction and Martyn for his additional help.**

*Patricia Curtis's*

# Desert Island Disks

## The games that Patricia simply couldn't live without

### 01 Super Mario Galaxy (WII)

I'm on an island and this would take a long time to finish. It makes you smile, makes you cry, makes you laugh – it's all there. There's so much different stuff to do. And I haven't played this one for more than half an hour at a friend's house so this would be a good one to settle down with.

### 02 R-Type (ARCADE)

It's tough! It's the pinnacle of shoot-'em-ups from that time and still holds up well today. Without *R-Type*, there wouldn't be any *Scorpius*. Mind you, there wouldn't have been an *IO* either!

### 03 Gauntlet (ARCADE)

It can just go on forever. Valkyrie needs food! If I find a game I like, I'll have a pop at doing a version. That's what you did in them days. Now it's all game design documents but back then, you'd see something in the arcades. You wouldn't video it or even photograph it; you'd go home with a memory of it. It wasn't so much a copy, it was an inspiration.

### 04 C64 Replay Cartridge

So I can programme the C64! You don't need to give me an instruction book, just something so I can freeze the memory. And if you won't give me this, I'll take a C64 with BASIC and just poke the f**ker!

### 05 Rez (DREAMCAST)

There aren't many modern games I like but this is just a superb game, on the right console at the right time. And yeah, it does remind me of my dancing days.

### 06 Sonic The Hedgehog (MEGA DRIVE)

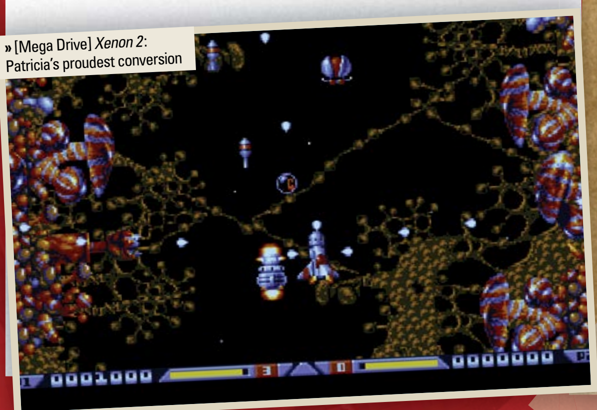
They took a platformer and made it so that you can go upside down and loop the loop. How the f**k did they do that?

### 07 Salamander (ARCADE)

Back to shoot-'em-ups! It was better than *Xevious* and before *R-Type* arrived. It was the one you played in the arcades at that time. I'd go down to the arcades on the seafront at Southend and that was where you'd get your inspiration for making games back then.

### 08 Marble Madness (ARCADE)

It was just something different [proceeds to hum main theme enthusiastically and mimes spinning trackball]. A great game!



» [Mega Drive] *Xenon 2*: Patricia's proudest conversion











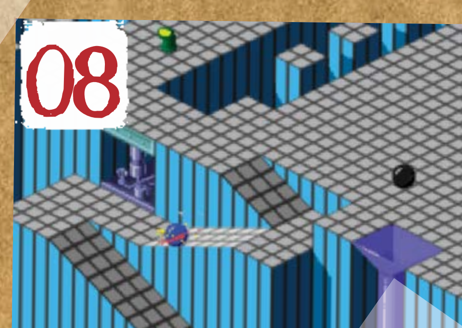












RETROREVIVAL

# Kirby 64: The Crystal Shards

## IT DOESN'T SHINE AS BRIGHT AS WE HOPED

**» NINTENDO 64 » HAL LABORATORY » 2000**

**Sadly, Nintendo's one and only *Kirby* game for the Nintendo 64 isn't an amazing one.** It's not terrible, but it's clearly a little lacking when compared to some of the early and later *Kirby* offerings.

Perhaps the biggest issue with it is that it's far too easy, offering little to no actual challenge. Enemy power-ups are plentiful; you can't seem to waddle anywhere without bumping into a piece of food, while Kirby's own ability to fly enables him to get past many barriers in the game. It's the perfect game for younger gamers, but it's not really going to give older ones too many issues. In fact some might even argue it's rather boring, with Kirby merrily trundling along the 2.5D pathways dispatching any enemies that wander into his way. While Kirby's quest for the titular crystal shards is a simple one, there are still some highly entertaining moments throughout its run time. One of my personal favourites can be found early in the game and involves a little minx who constantly draws enemies that come to life and attack you. Initially they prove to be no problem at all, but as the little girl get more agitated with your success she draws bigger and bigger monsters. It's a great little moment, made even more endearing by the way she hides behind her easel as you battle her latest creation. Eventually she'll run out of meanies and attack you herself, only to be easily overpowered by your heroic pink blob. You almost feel sorry for her. Almost… *





>> This month we not only take a look at the latest game in the Super Mario series, but also investigate the ZX Spectrum Vega. Is it worth £100? Turn the page to find out

# Super Mario Maker

## IF YOU BUILD IT, THEY MAY OR MAY NOT COME

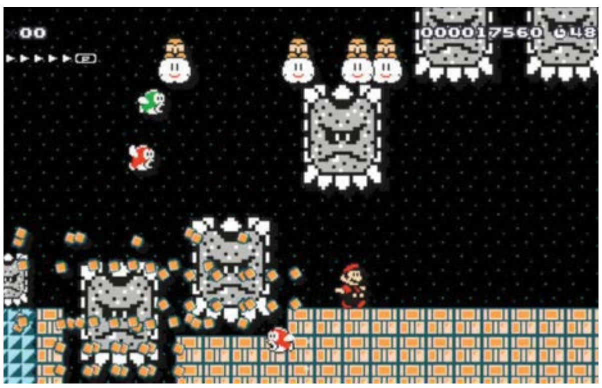
### INFORMATION

- » **FEATURED SYSTEM:** Wii U
- » **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** N/A
- » **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
- » **PRICE:** £39.99
- » **PUBLISHER:** NINTENDO
- » **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE
- » **PLAYERS:** 1

» [Wii U] We'd have loved a traditional story mode to have been included in Mario's new game.

**Great level design is something we all too often take for granted. But truth be told, Nintendo's mascot doesn't put his name to bad platformers.** Even weaker titles like *New Super Mario Bros. 2* are only disappointing because the chunky chap himself has already set the bar so high – by genre standards, they're still way up there in the upper tiers. This presents something of an issue with *Super Mario Maker*, a game that takes creative control of levels away from Nintendo's own team of experienced pros and places it in the hands of, for the most part, utter novices. We've played enough genuinely awful user-created stages to realise that making a great level is nowhere near as simple as *Mario Maker*'s clean and intuitive UI would have you believe. People work their entire lives in pursuit of perfecting this art so as you might expect, dumping blocks at random and placing hundreds of enemies and hazards just because you can simply doesn't cut it when you're effectively being allowed to create lost levels from such greats as *Super Mario Bros. 3* and *Super Mario World*. When Nintendo's own weaker *Mario* games struggle to live up to these classics, you sort of have to wonder what chance an amateur with a stylus really has of making something special.

That's the core problem with *Mario Maker* – however hard you work on a stage, the end result will be something that looks like a gaming classic but will almost never meet expectations in terms of quality. This is why the best levels right now are the gimmick ones, stages that push the limits of what the creation suite is capable of rather than trying to go toe-to-toe with three decades of experience. Auto-plays (levels crafted to guide Mario on a journey to the goal with no player input) are popular and awesome to watch, but these highlight that issue further – while they require precision placement and timing on the part of the creator in order to function, there's no call for the skilled pacing, challenge or flow that Nintendo levels have and so many of the pretenders also lack.



### BRIEF HISTORY

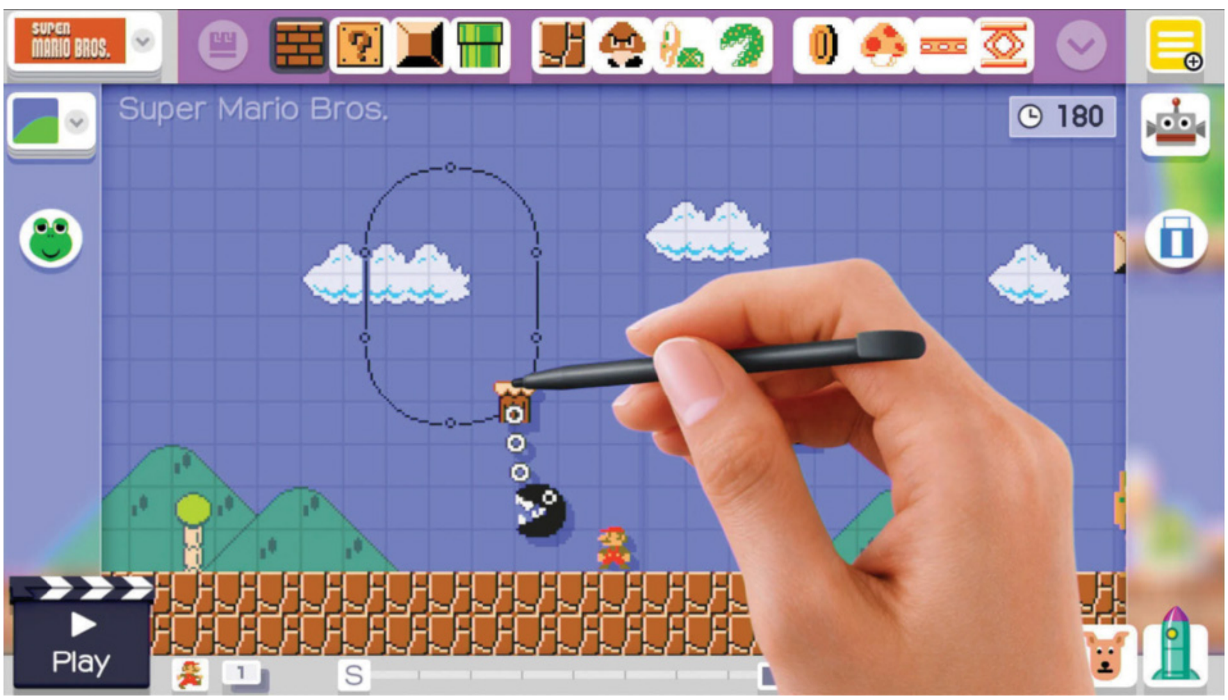
» You might recognise the star of the show from this issue's cover. *Super Mario* just hit the big three-zero and is one of gaming's most iconic characters, although his actual break came some years earlier, either as Jumpman in 1981's *Donkey Kong* or plan old Mario in the original *Mario Bros.* in 1983 depending where you want to start.



» [Wii U] There's a reason Nintendo never made levels this messy…



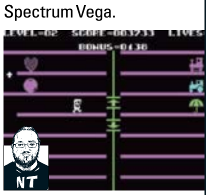
» [Wii U] Planning is crucial to creating an enjoyable stage.




### * PICKS OF THE MONTH



**DARRAN**
**Sabre Wulf**
After rinsing it on *Rare Replay*, I'm delighted that the Sabreman classic has been included on the ZX Spectrum Vega.



**NICK**
**Nifty Lifty**
I have very fond memories of this game, so it was rather satisfying to see it become the centre of attention in the office earlier this month.





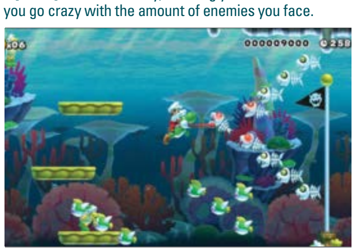

» [Wii U] There's an entertaining novelty to making enemies ride on other enemies…

> **"While Mario Maker does have pre-made levels to play through, there's no meat to this aspect of the game"**



» [Wii U] The 3D skin isn't as cool as the rest, but it does give Mario the best moveset.





» [Wii U] Needless to say, creating your own levels lets you go crazy with the amount of enemies you face.

That's not to say that it's all bad news, of course – there are clearly some skilled creators out there and by searching through the popular stages, you can easily get straight to the good stuff. The problem is that modes like the 100-Mario Challenge simply use randomly selected stages to make up their worlds. You can skip stages that you don't enjoy or can't figure out with a quick swipe on the Gamepad's touchscreen – a welcome inclusion given the amount of dross that has already been uploaded but still, nothing kills the mood like having to skip three or four messy stages in a row. This will improve over time as with any game that relies on user-generated content – *LittleBigPlanet* suffered similarly on launch but at least had a story mode to sample the suite's potential while people learned how to use it for themselves. While *Mario Maker* does have pre-made levels to play through, there's no meat to this aspect of the game, meaning you either need to be sieving through rubbish to find something half-decent to play, or making something yourself.

The latter is an aspect that's worth discussing, since it too has notable peaks and troughs. The good news here is that the editor itself is superb, simple drag-and-drop commands allowing you to let your imagination run wild. Well, in theory, at least. In practise, *Mario Maker* actually holds back a lot of the more interesting components via a time-based unlock system – play every day for a couple of weeks and you'll have everything at your fingertips but before that point, any great idea you might have for a level will have to wait until you actually get given the tools you need to make it. It's a frustration that only exists in that early stage of owning and playing the game, sure, but it's no less frustrating – we can see why Nintendo did it this way (so as not to intimidate newcomers to level editors and ease players into making more complex stages) but anyone with experience in making their own stages will just be annoyed at having to constantly return to a game that doesn't yet support their creativity in order to have it do so.

*Super Mario Maker* is almost impossible to pin a score on, simply because the majority of the game doesn't exist. Logic would suggest that creativity should improve with time, meaning that quality stages begin to edge out all the rubbish as the number of levels available continues to grow, so there's hope yet. The editor itself is great and it *is* satisfying to build your own level and then play through it. As builders get better and (if) Nintendo adds more to the suite via DLC to extend its life, this could grow into something awesome. But right now, it's a novel and occasionally enjoyable reminder that none of us are as good at making *Mario* levels as Nintendo is. ✱

LUKE ALBIGÉS

### ✱WHY NOT TRY

▼ SOMETHING OLD
**MARIO PAINT (SNES)**




▼ SOMETHING NEW
**LITTLEBIGPLANET 3 (PS4)**





» [Wii U] Now this is what you call a boss fight. Bowser has brought along some company…

## In a nutshell

***Mario Maker* will live or die by its community, so creative sorts would be advised to get involved early. If you're mainly looking to play, though, we'd advise you wait a bit.**

RetroGamer_Mag scored 7 for
Super Mario Maker
7
Follow our scores on JUST A SCORE




# ZX Spectrum Vega

## DOES THE DINKY DEVICE LIVE UP TO ITS HERITAGE?

### INFORMATION

» **FEATURED SYSTEM:** ZX SPECTRUM VEGA

» **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** N/A

» **RELEASED:** OUT NOW

» **PRICE:** £99.99

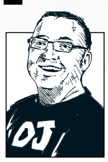
» **PUBLISHER:** RETRO COMPUTER LTD

» **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE

» **PLAYERS:** 1

### BRIEF HISTORY

» The Sinclair ZX80 was released in 1980 and was swiftly followed by the ZX81 in 1981. The ZX Spectrum arrived in 1982 and quickly became the most successful machine in the Sinclair brand, with 16 and 48k versions appearing. The ZX Spectrum Vega is clearly based on Sinclair's most popular product, with the box in particular mimicking the style of the original.




**In 2014, two Spectrum projects were in the works. One was Elite's recreation of the classic computer, which was** followed by controversy. The other was the ZX Spectrum Vega, an officially licensed product, which has also had controversy follow in its wake. As with our look at the Retron 5, we're not here to judge the controversy surrounding the product, but the product itself. Sadly, for the Vega, it's a product that does not make a very good first impression.

From the moment you open the box containing the Vega, everything about the system feels cheap. There's no power pack (you'll ideally plug the USB port directly into your TV or a handy phone charger) and there's no HDMI port. The decision to choose component feels wrong, as everything looks ugly as sin. Yes it will please those that grew up with a Spectrum, but newer owners are going to be put off, particularly when you consider the high price of £100 that the Vega retails for.

The cheapness continues to the product itself, which feels budget and flimsy (although we're a big fan of the lovely brushed finish). While the four main buttons are solid enough, the others, which were added after complaints from backers, feel tiny and useless. While some have uses for certain games, you'll typically use them to access menus and bring up the virtual keyboard or even save games (a very handy feature indeed).

The overall clunkiness of the Vega's keys continues to the menu system of the device, which is both ugly and awkward to navigate. There's no current option to scroll backwards through either the alphabet or the letter you've selected, which makes trying to find certain games a nuisance.

Although the Vega is something of a pain to navigate, it's actually easy as proverbial pie to use, something that stands in its favour. Simply plug it in and you're immediately good to go. All the preloaded games are mapped up too, meaning they're all instantly playable.

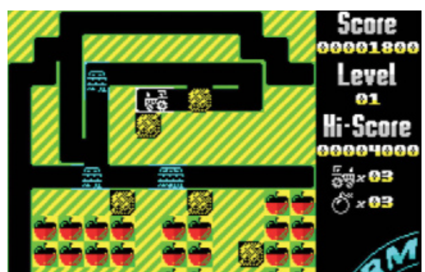
It's still far from perfect though, mainly due to the lack of an actual Spectrum keyboard. While many of the games are Kempston compatible, there are still a large number that require you to do additional things like press a certain input of keys or input your name before you start playing. And sadly, the virtual keyboard is utter rubbish to use. It's just about passable when you're looking for '0' so you can start playing a game, but the huge number of text adventures that have been thrown in become instantly pointless. Yes, there are some great games included, but the tedious input method will soon have you reaching for the reset buttons as playing them is torturously slow.




» The presentation will strike a chord with anyone that originally owned a ZX Spectrum.




» [ZX Spectrum] There's currently no legal way to play classics such as *Manic Miner* and *Jet Set Willy*.




» [ZX Spectrum] A large number of games are from prolific homebrew coders.




» [ZX Spectrum] Only the games from *Rare Replay* are included on the Vega. They're all better on *Rare Replay*.



» The lack of keys is a real sticking point, rendering the large number of adventure games pointless.


» It feels cheap to the touch, but the D-Pad is surprisingly effective for most games.

**"Although the Vega is something of a pain to navigate, it's actually easy as proverbial pie to use. Plug it in and you're good to go"**


» The addition of a SD Card opens up the Vega to more homebrew goodness. It's also easy to use.

And then, of course, there's the games themselves. Yes, there are a thousand games, which is great news, and yes there are some genuinely good ones too, but there's a lot of rubbish included. The lack of big name publishers is noticeable and disappointing. Codemasters, Ocean, Imagine Software, Activision, Elite, Software Projects, Melbourne House, Palace Software, US Gold, Hewson, Epyx, Domark, Firebird, Mastertronic, the list just goes on and on. Gremlin Graphics, Mikro-Gen and strangely, Ultimate Play The Game are some of the biggest publishers to be found, but even their libraries are incomplete, which makes you wonder how and why games were actually chosen. As a result its largely been left to homebrew coders and smaller companies to fill in the gaps and the results are middling to say the least.

A micro-SD card slot has been included, which allows you to add homebrew games to the device, as well as any new ones, which are created by Vega's developers. A bonus is that it's extremely simple to use – you simply drag and drop the files and then load straight from the card. .z80, .tap and .szx files are all supported, meaning you shouldn't have too much problem adding the extra games you want to play. It's a bit of hassle mapping said games to the device, but if you simply select Kempston you won't have to do any additional work, meaning you can instantly start playing the game in question.

As much as we enjoy the concept of the Vega it feels like a missed opportunity in its current guise. The ability to be unable to use a keyboard feels like a massive oversight and is further compounded by the sheer number of hard to play text adventures. Finding good games is a chore (it sorely needs a favourite tab or something similar) while the lack of major publishers pretty much kills the appeal of the machine instantly if you're a classic gamer. There are certainly some aspects of the Vega that we like and we've found some genuinely enjoyable games that we'd never have discovered otherwise, but it's simply not enough. If the Vega retailed at around the £30 mark it would be a lot easier to recommend and it would be easier to overlook its numerous shortcomings, but it costs over three times that amount. As a result it's incredibly hard to get excited about the Vega, even if it is an officially licensed product of one of the UK's most cherished computer brands. *

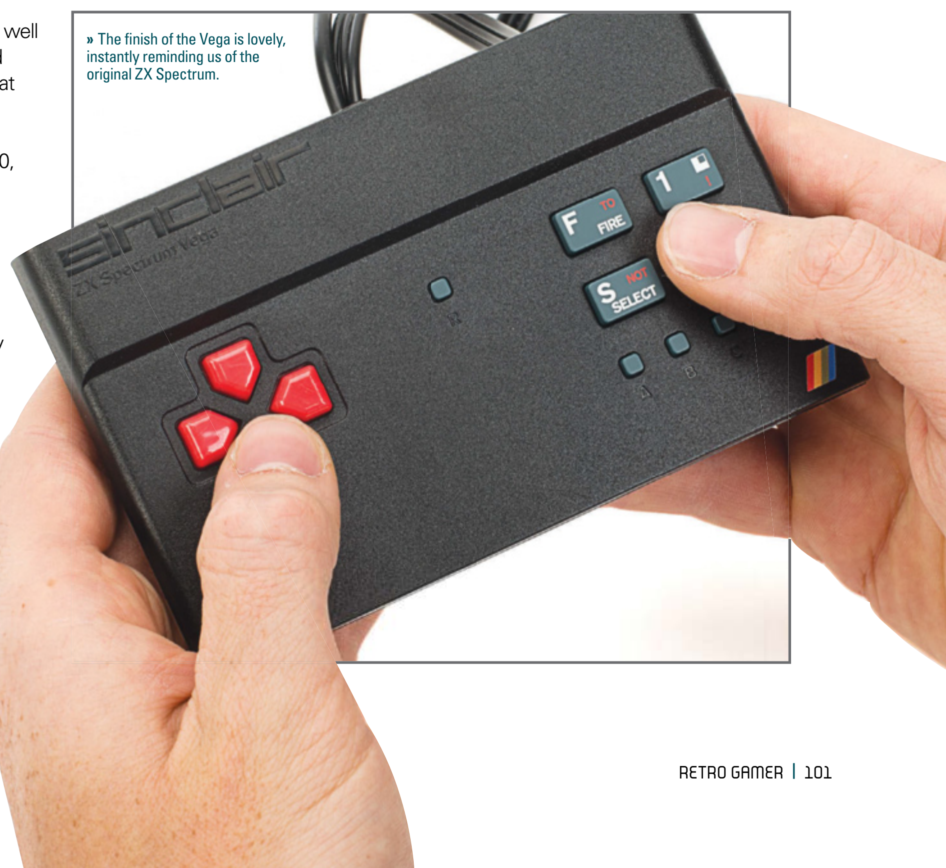
## PLAY THESE GAMES

10 games you have to play on the Vega

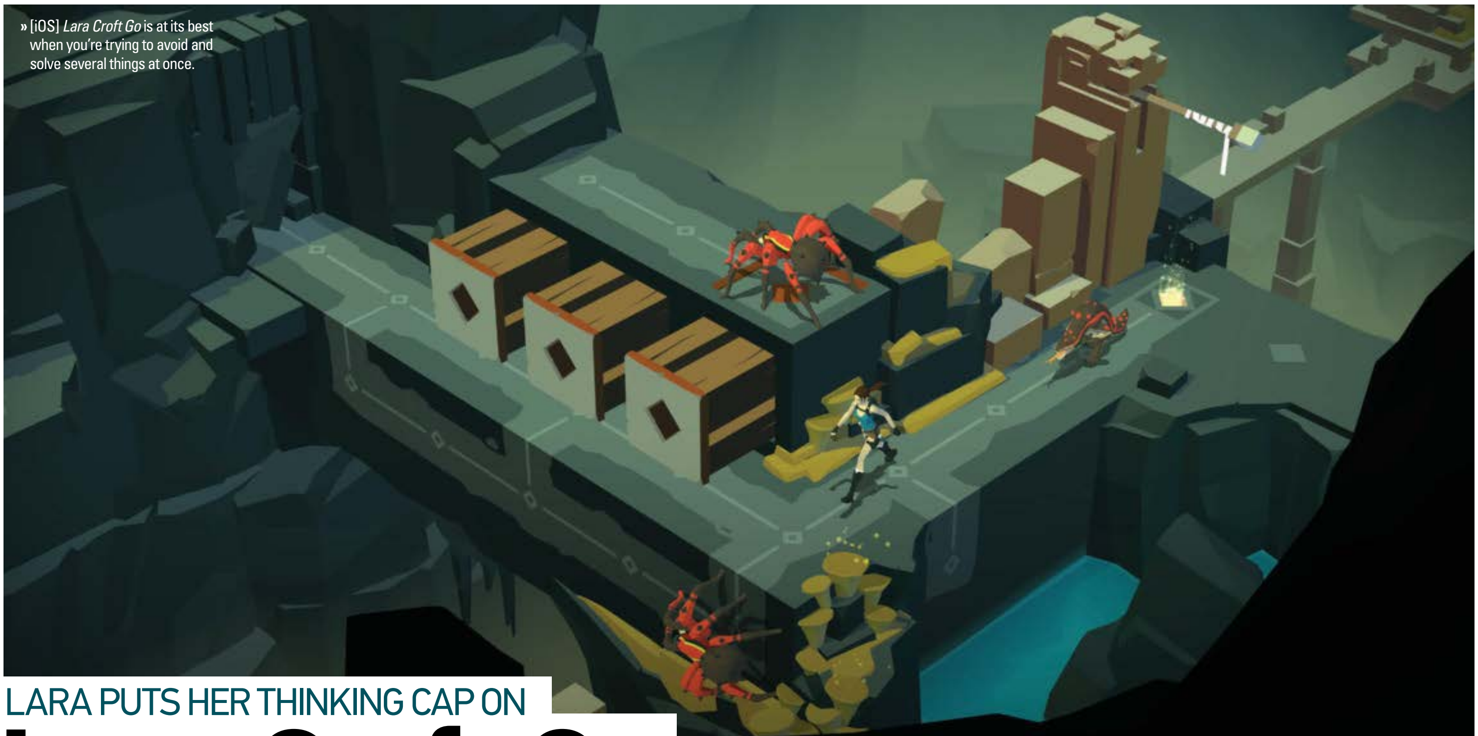
- SABRE WULF
- NIFTY LIFTY
- HORACE GOES SKIING
- ALBATROSSITY
- BOUNDER
- MONTY ON THE RUN
- KNIGHT LORE
- REX
- SAVAGE
- SPINDIZZY

### In a nutshell

**It's easy to set up and use and there are some genuinely cracking games to be found amongst the chaff, but that certainly doesn't stop the Vega from being an overpriced disappointment of a system.**


» The finish of the Vega is lovely, instantly reminding us of the original ZX Spectrum.


» Make sure your TV has USB support, otherwise you'll be looking for a suitable plug.



» [iOS] *Lara Croft Go* is at its best when you're trying to avoid and solve several things at once.

## LARA PUTS HER THINKING CAP ON

# Lara Croft Go

### INFORMATION

» **FEATURED SYSTEM:** iOS
» **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** Android
» **RELEASED:** Out now
» **PRICE:** £3.99
» **PUBLISHER:** Square Enix
» **DEVELOPER:** Square Enix Montreal
» **PLAYERS:** 1

### BRIEF HISTORY

» The original *Tomb Raider* was released in 1996 by Core Design and quickly turned into one of the PlayStation's biggest franchises. It's since been rebooted twice by Crystal Dynamics, once in 2006 with *Tomb Raider: Legend*, and more recently with 2013's *Tomb Raider. Rise Of The Tomb Raider* is due out shortly.

### ✱WHY NOT TRY

▼ SOMETHING OLD
**CHIP'S CHALLENGE (LYNX)**




▽ SOMETHING NEW
**HITMAN GO (IOS)**



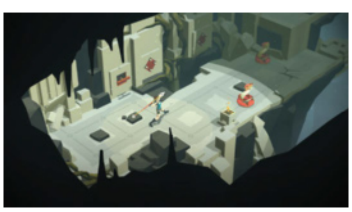


**Lara Croft has had something of a potted history on mobile platforms. While developers have managed** to cram her earlier PC adventures onto iOS and Android formats, they've been compromised by naff controls that made them all but unplayable. *Lara Croft: Relic Run* was a better idea, transplanting the popular heroine into a *Temple Run* mould, but it was still by no means perfect. And so we come to *Lara Croft Go*, a surprisingly enjoyable little puzzle game that also manages to capture many of the aspects of the bigger To*mb Raider* games.

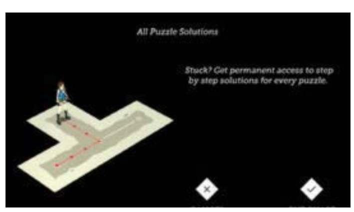
There's a story to *Lara Croft Go*, but it's not really important, effectively focusing on the intrepid adventurer collecting a number of prized artifacts. More impressive is the gorgeously understated locations and the excellent audio that does a fantastic job of conveying the faraway places that Lara finds herself exploring. It's perfect for mobile devices and also has enough flourishes to remind older gamers of the original games.

This symmetry is also mirrored in *Lara Croft Go*'s gameplay, which manages to cram many of the key staples of a *Tomb Raider* game into the turn-based puzzler. Lara can use her guns, but only when flanking or attacking from behind enemies, she can shimmy up and along walls, move levers, activate pressure points, push blocks and more. Enemies from across the series are also prevalent, but far fewer in number. Snakes attack Lara as she approaches them, spiders patrol specific routes, while lizard men follow Lara wherever she goes. Separately, these monsters and hazard prove no problem for Lara to navigate, but combined together they create some clever, but overly easy puzzles.

Being the intrepid explorer that she is, Lara must also track down a number of items and objects on her travels that will grant bonuses like additional outfits. While they're all incredibly easy to collect (you simply tap them) many are deviously hidden, meaning you'll often have to return to levels to retrieve everything. And that's where *Lara Croft Go* loses its footing slightly. While *Hitman Go* presented numerous ways to solve your problem, there's only ever one solution here, making revisting the game rather tiresome. There are only currently 40 puzzles too, which are solved far too quickly for our liking due to their relative easiness. It's certainly fun while it lasts though. ✱



» [iOS] You'll need the spear to attack enemies from a distance. Annoyingly, they're in short supply.




» [iOS] Bizarrely, you can unlock solutions for £3.99. Alternately you can use this thing called the internet.



» [iOS] Switches can be used to access new areas or simply trap dangerous enemies and items.

## In a nutshell

**There are some great ideas in *Lara Croft Go*, but its focus on easy puzzles and limited ways of solving them means that there's very little replay value.**

6 — RetroGamer_Mag scored **6** for Lara Croft Go

Follow our scores on JUST A SCORE

# Welcome to Homebrew




>> There has been quite a few ported games released recently so it seems like a good time to remind developers of the potential issues; remember, these old titles may be abandoned but whoever owns the copyrights may have an problem! If at all possible, make sure you reach out to the appropriate people and request permission



» [Web] Web-based entry *Outbound.*

## MORE JAM, VICAR?

**The fourth GB Jam ran for ten days during August 2015 and, as with previous instalments, the objective was to produce games that simulated Nintendo's seminal handheld and worked within its tight, four colours per screen restrictions.** Since dungeons are always popular in Game Boy titles, there were a few competition entries featuring them such as *Emerald Dungeon, Assault On Slime Fortress* or *Dread Bones* but there's a wealth of other genres to choose from. Shoot-'em-up fans can give *Orbit* or *Eyes Over Ocean* a blast or perhaps take a look at the more action-oriented platformers such as *Outbound, Ultra Fighter* or *Shooting Star* where the instructions claim that the player must punch space dinosaurs until they explode!

Then there are the *Arkanoid* variants like the gloriously titled *Attack Of The Mutant Blocks From Outer Space, Aliens Go Home Run* which sports a baseball theme and some nifty artwork or the simpler gameplay of straight *Breakout* clones *Brick Breaker* and *Paddle Pong.* Continuing the arcade theme, *Pirate Pop* is a *Pang*-flavoured bubble-popping affair with a nautical pirate theme and fans of platforming action haven't been left out either with *Trappy Mine,* the nice looking but sadly incomplete *Where's My Dog* or the Metroidvania-stylings of *Cuckoo Castle.*

One or two games push things somewhat on the Game Boy simulation front – we are really not sure if something like *Biplane GB* is in the spirit of the competition – and there are some promising titles like the wonderfully named *Derrick Stroyer And The Green Crusade* suffer from nasty bugs due to the limited development cycle enforced by the GB Jam rules, but we've barely scratched at the surface of the hundred and eighty or so games that are available to wade through at the official jam site over at Kikstart.eu/gbjam-4.

> "Pirate Pop is a bubble-popping affair with a pirate theme"

## Incoming

**This issue we have a Speccy version of Alley Cat and an intellivision port of a classic memory game**

KIKSTART.EU/FRACTALUS-WIN



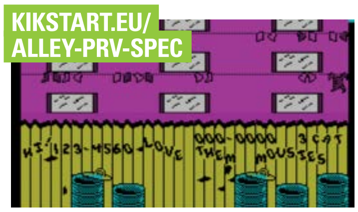
▲ A remake of *Rescue On Fractalus* for Windows is underway; it's slowly getting there and looks interesting.

▼ An isometric gap in the Atari 8-bit's catalogue is soon to be filled by a neat port of *Bobby Bearing.*



KIKSTART.EU/BEARING-A8

KIKSTART.EU/ALLEY-PRV-SPEC



▲ It's still a kitten right now, but a conversion of *Alley Cat* for the Spectrum is shaping up nicely.

# NEW GAMES NEEDED

If you have a homebrew project you would like to see featured then please contact us at:
**retrogamer@imagine-publishing.co.uk**

## WORK IN PROGRESS

It's in the early stages of production and doesn't have a name at the moment, but there are a couple of example screens from a new text adventure being shown over at the CPC Wiki forums – have a look behind Kikstart.eu/nameless-cpc for the thread in question – which are looking very interesting. We're assuming that the text-only screenshot we've included won't be indicative of the final game because there's also some good concept art on display to go with it, so brave Amstrad CPC adventurers will want to keep their eyes on the forums for further developments.



» [Amstrad CPC] A work in progress.




» Atari 8-bit] Just come along baby.

## HAVE YOU PLAYED…

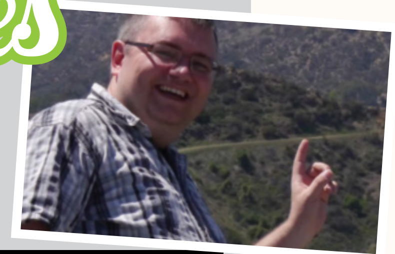
The annual ABBUC software competition for the Atari 8-bit computers is upon us once more and there appear to be seven entries from a mixture of regular contributors like Matosimi or Jason Kendall and some newcomers too. We only know about a couple of the games at the time of writing like Lyren Brown and José Pereira's conversion of the C64 *Kaboom!* clone *Bomber* so, although Kikstart.eu/abbuc-2015 goes to the discussion thread at Atari Age, we're looking forward to taking a proper look at the entries once they're made available because there are still a few hidden surprises to follow.

▼ The Intellivision recently gained a release of the electronic game *Simon*, which was originally written in 2014.

**KIKSTART.EU/ SIMON4-INT**




# Homebrew heroes



**We recently enjoyed getting our heads around Laserball 2015 so we decided to use a laser to contact developer Thomas Ilg for an interview only to find out it would have been easier to send him an email**

**Where did the idea for the original *Laserball* come from?**
First of all *Laserball* is a puzzle game. When I started with the principal concept it was 1991, I was 17 and the idea was influenced by games I played at the time, namely *Oxyd* and *Atomix*. Somehow I combined those influences with new ideas and *Laserball* was born. Interestingly enough I have never heard about or seen the very popular game *Deflektor* until others pointed out the similarity in 2014. They are definitely right, but *Defektor* wasn't an influence.

**And what led you to producing the 2015 edition?**
In 'real life' I am a film editor. In 2014 I edited an international feature film and lived in a hotel room for a month. One evening I started up the Atari emulator on my laptop and not too long after I was lost – it became my evening entertainment to play around with new ideas in my old code.

**Were there any high or low points during the development?**
I love the new graphics by Melanie Schober and the music by xFalcon. It was great bringing these elements together with the game in 2014. It became so much more of a complete game at that moment.

On the other hand the one thing that bugs me all the time is my personal lack of programming skills when it comes to the deep down technical stuff. All I have ever done is GFA BASIC. I have never actually mastered C or Assembler. And you see it when you look at the technical performance of *Laserball*, just watch at the horizontal scrolling of the game. There are people out there, who can get nice scrolling out of the Atari ST but I am not one of them.




» [Atari ST] Learning the ropes.

**And was there anything you'd have done differently with hindsight?**
If anything I wish that I'd learnt C when I was young.

**How has the feedback been so far from players so far?**
The feedback was amazing, actually many of the improvements made in the last month are the result of feedback from the Atari ST community, something that simply did not exist in 1991. It helped to make the game understandable and playable. That resulted in feedback like the one from Atary Crypt which rather nicely read: "One of the best thinking games ever released on the Atari ST"

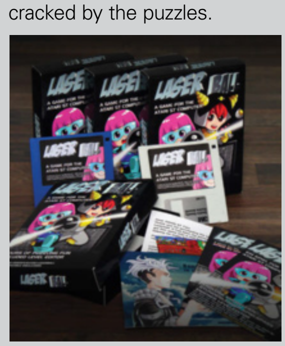
**And finally, have you decided on your next project?**
There is no plan… unfortunately I have never done any other game that is even close to *Laserball* so it's unlikely that there will be another game for the ST. Of course I would like to port it to modern platforms, but I am lacking modern programming skills and *Laserball*'s concept does not fit in any modern gaming market. Today gamers like to have a perfect 3D action packed experience or they like to have their twenty seconds on a phone. *Laserball* doesn't offer any of these, it's a game where one needs to sit down and let his brain be cracked by the puzzles.



» [Atari ST] Lots of laser, but no sharks.



» [Atari ST] Things get… complicated.



» [Atari ST] Thinking inside the box.

# MAJESTY OF SPRITES

» **FORMAT:** COMMODORE PLUS/4 » **DEVELOPER:** BLAUKNEKT
» **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.EU/MOS-264 » **PRICE:** FREE DOWNLOAD (PRICE TBA)

**It's been said that readers can be transported to far away, mystical worlds by their books, but when Kate sits down to read her sister's magical tome that happens for real and after nodding off she wakes to find herself in colourful, unfamiliar and surprisingly hostile surroundings.** Kate's journey is split into two chapters, with the quest in the first being to travel from left to right through the screens, collecting the quota of hearts needed to unlock the exit. There are enemies skulking around too which can be disposed of by jumping on them a few times or using the 'ball' weapons found in special blocks scattered through the stage.

The task changes for the second chapter, however. Although the hearts are still worth collecting as bonus items, there are fairies in dire need of rescuing which are the primary concern. Creatures are still patrolling the platforms to get in our heroine's way which can be dealt with as before or by pulling down on the joystick for a dash attack, but the action now takes place within sprawling multi-directionally scrolling maps that are remarkably easy to get lost in.

*Majesty Of Sprites* is two different games in one, a tweaked and improved version of the already nice flip screen platformer we saw previewed at the Revision demo party earlier in the year and the new scrolling game which is even more impressive – the emphasis is on platforming but the controls reminded us of *Turrican* on the C64. There are a few nasty leaps of faith in the first chapter where Kate must jump and hope there's something to land on – this can sometimes be alleviated by jumping, forcing the screen to flip and then turning back – and it's occasionally hard to tell what is or isn't a platform when entering a new stage at least until things are investigated, but both games are well-executed, sport some wonderfully colourful graphics, use the TED's sound capabilities well and are fun to play.

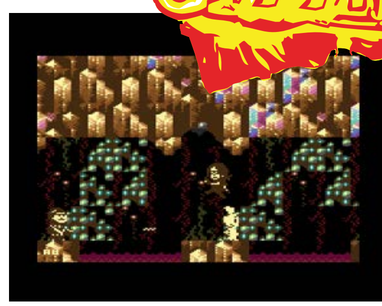
RetroGamer_Mag scored **9** for
Majesty Of Sprites
9
Follow our scores on JUST A SCORE



» [Plus/4] Down the waterfall.



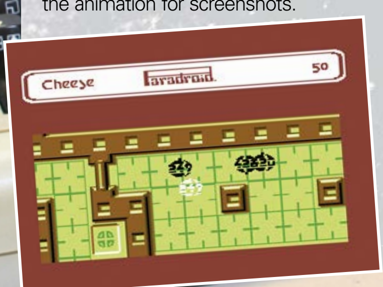
» [Amiga] Now what could this guy possibly want?


» [Plus/4] Tense, nervous headache?

## Make this

**Every month our very own Jason Kelk will be teaching you handy new programming techniques. This month: balancing presentation**

**1** Getting balance right with presentation is important; get it right and players don't notice, get things wrong and they'll be frustrated. Andrew Braybrook's games think of everything, with *Paradroid* on the C64 even having a 'cheese' mode pausing the animation for screenshots.

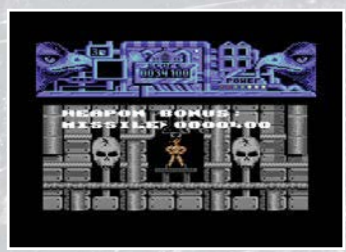





**2** The long process of totalling up the end of game scores in *Tro-Now* for the Mega Drive takes some time and could have left players bored, but the developers were very sensible and gave them the option of skipping to the end.

**3** The movie option in *RoboCop Classic* shows stills from the film to push the story along; this can be disabled from the menu but that doesn't stop one appearing at game over; the game is already frustrating without that delay before restarting!





**4** But a long-winded and unskippable bonus totalising screen can be okay in one or two circumstances – if the game is loading the next level in the background for example and both *Flimbo's Quest* and *Hawkeye* put this to very good use.

# SERPENT CAVES – RETRO EDITION

» **FORMAT:** COMMODORE VIC 20 » **DEVELOPER:** RAVENXAU
» **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.EU/SERPENT-CAVES-VIC » **PRICE:** FREE


» [VIC 20] It had to be snakes!

The Serpent Caves are an uncharted territory, full of the kind of treasures and perils that the average adventurer can't resist. Exploration is key because roaming around each area reveals not only where diamonds and the all-important exit are, it also exposes the stage itself and the reptiles aren't visible until the area they're in has been visited.

It's not all bad news for the would-be explorer, however, because the snakes move at the same speed as their quarry and everything is turn-based so they'll politely wait for the player to make a move. This makes for a slower pace but adds to the tension and indeed atmosphere as each step could reveal another adversary. There's a more fleshed out version in the works which we're looking forward to playing, but this is still a tense experience.

RetroGamer_Mag scored **7** for
Serpent Caves - Retro Edition
7
Follow our scores on JUST A SCORE


» [VIC 20] Off exploring.

# TRO-NOW

» **FORMAT:** SEGA MEGADRIVE » **DEVELOPER:** 1985 ALTERNATIVO
» **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.EU/TRO-NOW-MD » **PRICE:** FREE

This takes place in a world which will be familiar to anybody who has seen the *Tron* movies, except that the instructions say that the battle isn't merely for control of the system because the factions are also fighting over the fate of Comic Sans! This war is quite civilised, though, with the victor being whichever side does best on the field of play in their brightly coloured Light Cycles.

The two game modes spawn either two or four cycles into the playfield with at least one being under human control while the rest are available to other players or handed over to the MVP and the ultimate winner is simply the one who gets more opponents to crash into their trail. As with any other Light Cycles game, *Tro-Now* is at its best with a couple of friends present.



» [Megadrive] Can it send me to Hawaii?

RetroGamer_Mag scored **7** for
Tro-Now
7
Follow our scores on JUST A SCORE

# ROBOCOP CLASSIC

» **FORMAT:** WINDOWS » **DEVELOPER:** PARK PRODUCTIONS » **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.EU/PARK-GAMES » **PRICE:** FREE

The 8-bit conversions of *Robocop* always had a reputation for being difficult games and Park Productions' remake for Windows-based systems really takes that to heart. *RoboCop Classic* is built with in-game graphics and sound from the Amstrad CPC conversion, but has silky-smooth movement and an option to play in movie mode where the story of Alex Murphy becoming the titular cyborg is introduced through converted still images.

While we can appreciate that the developer wanted to remain true to the original, even the people who did well with it in the Eighties would struggle now and this is one case where an easier play mode would have been nice. While its presentation is decent, players will find it too frustrating; that said, any who enjoyed the pain from the original game may feel at home.


» [Windows] I'd buy that for a dollar.

RetroGamer_Mag scored **6** for
Robocop Classic
6
Follow our scores on JUST A SCORE

# RED PLANET

» **FORMAT:** SINCLAIR SPECTRUM » **DEVELOPER:** SALVADOR CANTERO
» **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.EU/RED-PLANET-SPEC » **PRICE:** FREE

The old space station orbiting the Red Planet has become infested with hostile life forms and the decision has come down from on high to blow it to smithereens. Now you're tasked with finding and priming all the explosives, which also means dodging or blasting enemies as well.

Doors to some parts of the station are locked so key cards will be needed for them and there are pick-ups such as guns with limited ammo and all-important air tanks; let that counter run down and you'll die.

This is tough and, although a limited oxygen supply pretty much always encourages haste, running around will prove fatal since even a light fitting can potentially take a life away. Instead it's sensible to learn the layout of the station and note where all the useful tools and creatures are.

RetroGamer_Mag scored **8** for
Red Planet
8
Follow our scores on JUST A SCORE



» [Spectrum] Health and safety will be upset.

# MAILBAG

**HAVE YOUR SAY…** SEND US A LETTER OR MAKE YOURSELF HEARD ON THE ONLINE FORUM – **WWW.RETROGAMER.NET**

## WIN!

Every month, one lucky writer-in will receive a copy of our latest eMag, **Retro Gamer Load 3**, a bargain if ever there was one



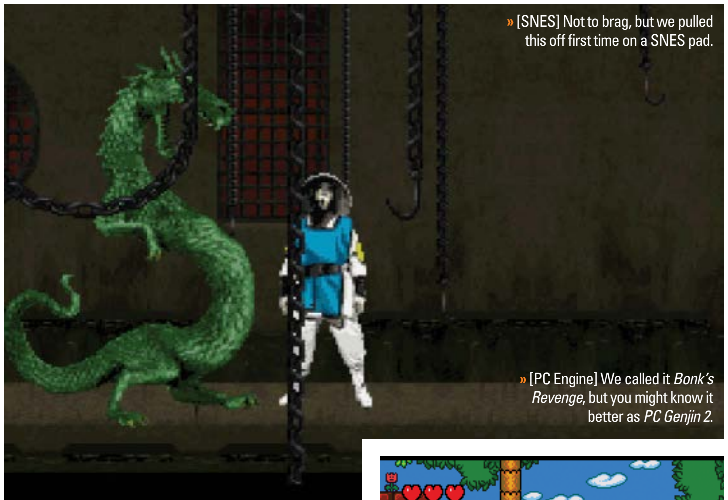

### SHOCK BLOCKED

Hi there,
I subscribed to the mag from April this year after years of knowing about you, but denying I needed you until the onset of adulthood. I am now at peace with my inner big kid. I wish I still had my Atari Jaguar, but I sold it in a jumble sale in 2002 – but then again life is full of crushing mistakes.

Will we be seeing the *Mortal Kombat II* Ultimate Guide advertised for issue 145? I was really looking forward to the usual insight you give. My insight would be that Nintendo should be offering compensation to those of us suffering with severe RSI after having spent hours attempting to input eight-press fatalities in 0.45 seconds on the SNES' turgid D-pad.

They didn't censor the game, they just made it impossible to see any gore unless we were all willing to sacrifice the use of all tendons for days on end. This is a major trauma for any teenage boy.

John Roy



» [SNES] Not to brag, but we pulled this off first time on a SNES pad.

**We're glad to hear that you're enjoying the magazine! You'll be pleased to see that *Mortal Kombat II* is in this very issue, alongside *Friday The 13th* and the *Splatterhouse* series, making this an especially gory issue of Retro Gamer. We've even highlighted a big selection of the goriest and most grotesque fatalities in the *Mortal Kombat II* feature.**




» [PC Engine] We called it *Bonk's Revenge*, but you might know it better as *PC Genjin 2*.

### TURBOGRAFX TROUBLES

Hi **Retro Gamer**,
I love your magazine, but the Top 25 PC Engine Games feature annoyed me. It says Top 25 PC Engine Games, but you called *PC Genjin 2 Bonk's Revenge*, *Gunhed* was *Blazing Lazers* and *Devil Crash* was called *Devil's Crush*. I know these were the names when released in America but this was a PC Engine list. Minor gripe I know, but it bothered me.

Doug Orr

**Hi Doug, sorry the naming issue annoyed you. Indeed, it's an unusual mix-and-match – we normally use English language names over Japanese ones when possible, as seen with the games themselves. However, since the majority of UK coverage of the machine itself was under the PC Engine name, we decided that would be the more familiar option over Turbografx. Thankfully, it's an unusual situation that isn't likely to come up often.**

## STAR LETTER

## WHAT'S IN A NAME?

Dear **RG**!
When I got a look at the list of games for the ZX Spectrum Vega, I was overcome with a wave of nostalgia – not for many of the games themselves (though I won't turn down the chance to play more *Sabre Wulf*), but for the ridiculous names that games used to have.

Sure, today's games might have thousands of times more processing power behind them and budgets that make your eyes spin, but they all have boring names. Let's be honest – titles like *Destiny* and *Project Cars* are dull and corporate. What we need is more stuff like *Adventures Of A Common Frog*, *Hard Cheese* and *Just One Of Those Days*. Even offbeat concepts lack good names now. Back in the Eighties, if you made a lawnmower game, it'd be called "*Hovver Bovver*" – today, it'd be called *Grass Cutting Simulator*.

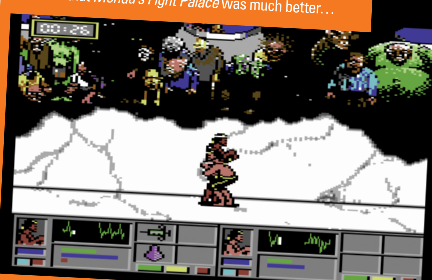
When did videogames become so safe and dull? More importantly, do you ever see us returning to these good old days?

Phil Osgood

**We too miss titles like *Bionic Granny*, *Eric And The Floaters* and *Tongue Of The Fatman*. We'd say the creativity was scaled back during the Nineties, when teams became bigger and the money men started getting far more deeply involved.**

**Will we ever see silly names back? It's not that long ago when Hollywood called a film *Snakes On A Plane*. Beyond that, indie developers have come up with some wonderful titles in recent times, like *Shower With Your Dad Simulator 2015* and *I Am Bread*.**

» [C64] Of course, *Tongue Of The Fatman* was renamed for C64. Not that *Mondu's Fight Palace* was much better…



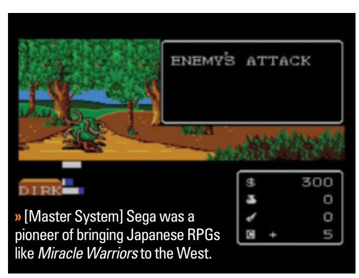



» [ZX Spectrum] *Just One Of Those Days* is an unlikely office hit on the strength of its name.

### FIND THE MIRACLE BALL

Hi guys,
Great magazine, I have been buying you as much as I can since issue four and love everything you do. Just wanted to drop a quick line about a game I played on my Sega Master System back in about 1988 called *Miracle Warriors*. It was a huge and complex RPG and I remember playing it for hours (even my dad played it while I was at school). I'd love to see a feature on the game if possible. Keep up the great work.

Martin Sadler




» [Master System] Sega was a pioneer of bringing Japanese RPGs like *Miracle Warriors* to the West.

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**_Miracle Warriors_ is an interesting one – it's most well known for being the first Japanese RPG to grace the Master System in English, and quite possibly the first to be officially translated at all. In Japan, it actually started life on the PC-88 and also found its way to the Famicom, MSX and Fujitsu FM-7. There was also a Japan-only sequel called _Wings Of Arugisu_, released exclusively for the MSX2. It might be hard to get in touch with anyone who worked on the game, but we can certainly look into it.**

## SLUG REPELLENT

Hi **Retro Gamer,**

I really enjoyed the Neo-Geo feature in issue 146, but after reading it I've decided to come clean about a secret I've kept for nearly 20 years. I just *don't like Metal Slug*, nor any of the sequels for that matter. Don't get me wrong, I can see the appeal. The visuals are well-drawn and the animations are funny and the music is memorable, but past a certain point there's too much carnage and I don't feel in control – I never see what's going to kill me until it already has. Of course looking over the welcome page, I already know that most of the **Retro Gamer** team disagrees with me. So, my question is this: do you guys have any contrarian views on popular games?

Kevin Logan

**We certainly do. Darran's views on _Dig Dug_ are well known, but the other members of the team also have games that make them see red. Nick once declared _Diablo II_ as, "the least interesting game ever made," but paradoxically (maybe even hypocritically) he loves _Phantasy Star Online_. Drew regularly courts controversy by talking about his distaste for _The Legend Of Zelda: Ocarina Of Time_, but he's bought it enough times to have given it a fair shot. Meanwhile, Jon could never got on with _Tekken_ – besides preferring the likes of _Street Fighter_, he didn't quite get why every punch had to be accompanied by a full-on explosion.**

### DISCUSSED THIS MONTH

**Nifty Lifty**

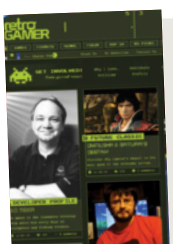
**In a month where a new _Metal Gear Solid_ game was released, the big spectator game in the office was actually this surprise hit inclusion on the ZX Spectrum Vega. Staff from the whole videogames department gathered to watch Darran's heroic effort, which completely overshadowed his first somewhat underwhelming performance.**







» [Neo Geo] Kevin's not a fan of *Metal Slug* – but the world would be boring if we all thought the same.



# From the forum

» www.retrogamer.net/forum

Every month, **Retro Gamer** asks a question on the forum and prints the best replies. This month we wanted to know…

## Your gory gaming memories

**adippm82**
*Rise Of The Triads* is one that immediately springs to mind, ridiculous gibs! Arms, legs and eyeballs flying about everywhere.

**Big Shoes**
*Mortal Kombat* was the first time I saw fatalities, it was amazing at the time and you just had to try every character to see what happened.

**necronom**
*Technocop* on the Amiga. Me and my brother found the deaths fantastic! People virtually explode when shot. There's blood and guts everywhere, then what's left of the body twitches on the floor.

**Antiriad2097**
An early favourite for gore was *Nemesis The Warlock* on the Spectrum, where piling bodies up was a useful and sometimes necessary gameplay tactic.

**General Opulence**
Has to be *Gloom* on the Amiga – an FPS where bloody body parts fly off after shooting an enemy, complete with squelchy sounds! Classic!

**Bluce_Ree**
*Barbarian* on the Speccy. It may have had a dozen or so moves but I wouldn't know because all I did was the flying neck chop in the hope of decapitating every enemy.

**DRS**
The bloodied ravaging in *Forbidden Forest* on the C64… it might just seem like a mess of red pixels today but back then it really felt like you were being horribly mutilated. I still wake up screaming about giant spiders.

**gman72**
*Soft And Cuddly* on the Spectrum. Severed heads and piles of steaming guts all over the shop.

**Archaic Koala**
Most gruesome death in a game? I was just plain disturbed the first time the chainsaw dude in *Resident Evil 4* killed me, I wasn't expecting something so… graphic.

**joefish**
I quite liked the meaty chunks explosions of your enemies in *Unreal Tournament*. My favourite kill was to lob the teleporter at an opponent then transport to it, right on top of them, causing them to explode in all directions all around you.

**Doddsy**
*Green Beret*. That's a game that would've been debated in Parliament if knife crime was as bad as it is today.

**The Beans**
*Heart Of Darkness* on PSone. I don't think any other game kills a kid in so many unplesant ways.


**retro GAMER**

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## The Lords Of Midnight

■ Martyn Carroll looks back at the hit 8-bit series that cemented Mike Singleton as one of the Spectrum's top coders

## SNES

■ Developers celebrate the 25th anniversary of the hit console and reveal how Nintendo got it oh-so right

Discover how M2 converted Treasure's stunning run-and-gun to 3DS and why it nearly didn't make it to the west.

## Worms

■ As Team 17's popular franchise turns 20, we quiz the developer about its most successful series

## And much more, including…

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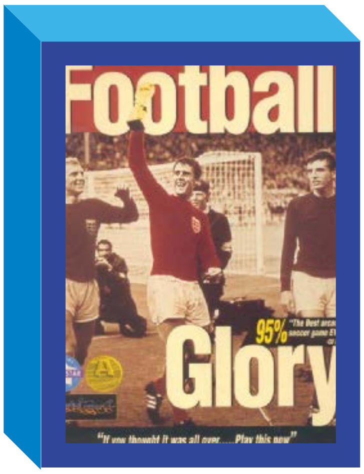

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# ENDGAME




## FOOTBALL GLORY

» Just a few seconds can change everything in a game of football. A moment of brilliance can break a deadlock and bring about a stunning victory, and sometimes one blunder is solely responsible for a crushing defeat. Football Glory hung its hat on the English triumph of 1966, and challenged players to turn those opportunities to their advantage. Here's what happened if you successfully did so…



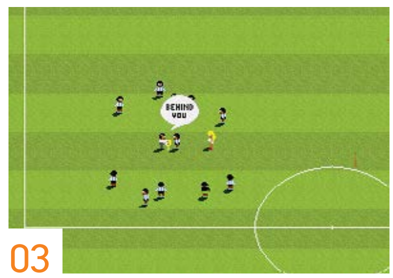

01

» Your manager is massively proud of your achievements and rightly so, as you've won the cup. He singles you out for special praise, in fact, proclaiming you to be "the best" – well, there's no better time to take a bow, player!



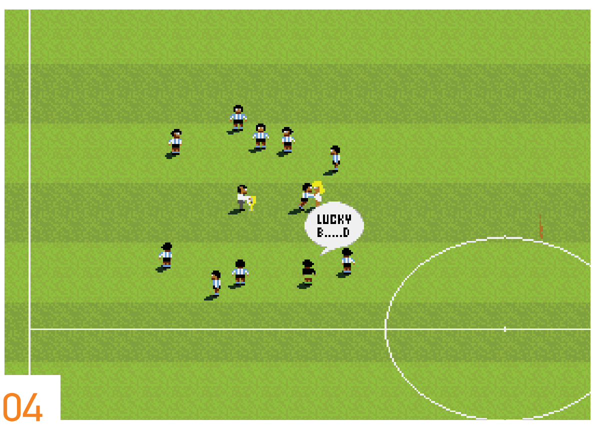

02

» Unfortunately, your player is a mercenary jerk. He finds no thrill in pushing himself to be the very best, in working with his team or in conquering the opposition. No, for your player, it's all about getting those pound notes.



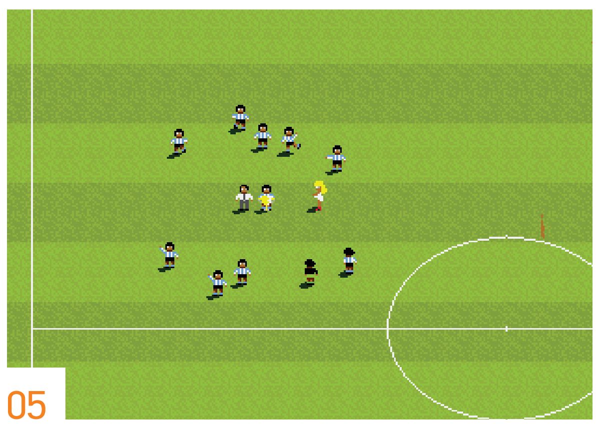

03

» Worse yet, it turns out that his behaviour is not condemned, but rewarded. The small clump of extra pixels on the chest confirms that the blonde behind this guy is a female – and of course, she's here to see him.




04

» The referee looks on jealously as the player cavorts with his female companion in full view of the watching crowd. It's a rather uncomfortable moment for everyone, as they get rather more intimate than they should. Surely a post-match red card for unsportsmanlike conduct and excessive celebration is in order?



05

» Finally, your player remembers that he's won a cup, and lazily hoists it to chest height. Tonight, he's going home to his mansion, intending to waste his millions on a lavish party for all the hangers-on. He is indisputably horrible, and your son considers him a role model. Weep for your child.